



COMBAT

Manchuria 1904-05

Russian Soldier **VERSUS** Japanese Soldier

David Campbell



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Illustrated by Steve Noon

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Introduction

Soldiers of the Russian Empire passing through the gates of Mukden (Shenyang), Manchuria, likely in late summer 1904. Russian troops were mostly drawn from peasant stock; few were literate. Most were fired with a simple patriotism that often translated into steadfastness and courage in battle. (Library of Congress)



The war between Russia and Japan had its roots in Chinese weakness. Unable to secure its own borders, China had been prey to foreign intervention and catastrophic internal conflict for much of the 19th century, a state of affairs that encouraged the Russians – always covetous of the lands that bordered their Siberian hinterland – to seek expansion in East Asia. By a similar token the newly invigorated nation of Japan had begun to look beyond the limits of its own borders, determining that for its own security it was necessary to control Korea (then under Chinese suzerainty) and parts of Manchuria if it was to stifle the potential threat that future Russian expansion might herald.

Through the waning years of the 19th century Japan sought to expand its sphere of influence, especially over Korea, which led to the First Sino-

Japanese War in 1894–95. Japan's victory was quickly soured by the intervention of France, Germany and Russia in the peace negotiations, all pursuing their own ends, and most particularly by Russia which secured for itself the warm-water harbour of Port Arthur (Lüshun City), an anchorage on Manchuria's Liaotung (Liaodong) Peninsula. The port had long been coveted by the Russians who needed an anchorage that would complement Vladivostok, which was hemmed-in by ice for half the year. This development – coupled with the ongoing construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, a massive endeavour to connect Moscow with Vladivostok that had been started in 1891 and which cut across the Amur River, the traditionally agreed border between

Russia and Manchuria since 1689 – posed a considerable threat to Japanese interests and possibly to Japan itself. Russian influence was further extended by the construction of a spur from the Trans-Siberian Railway that ran south through Mukden (Shenyang) to Port Arthur.

Japan, for so long locked away from the wider world due to the insular and xenophobic culture of the shōguns, had developed a keen sense of its own vulnerability in the wake of the nation's exposure to the western world, initiated by Commodore Matthew Perry's arrival in Edo Bay on 8 July 1853. The obvious military power of the American sailor's small fleet

had initiated a cultural and technical shockwave that would see the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate which had isolated the Japanese islands from nearly all outside influence for the previous 250 years. The Emperor Meiji came to the throne in 1867, continuing the radical programme of westernization initiated by his father Komei; the new culture that developed from the medieval remnants of Samurai rule was a curious blend of intensely nationalistic fervour (embodied by strict obedience to the will of the Emperor) mixed with an open-minded assessment of the foreign practices and technologies that would be necessary if Japan was to become a modern power. The transformation of an insular, rural and apparently backward society into a technologically and structurally sophisticated state capable of meeting one of the world's great empires on an even footing within the space of only 50 years was unprecedented.

Russia in comparison looked to be at the height of its powers, the possessor of the world's largest standing army, a modern fleet and relatively recent military success in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), but the prestige and vast reach that its empire enjoyed hid a myriad of problems that would be exposed by the coming conflict. Politically stunted, socially regressive and economically underdeveloped, the broader problems of Russian society – patronage, corruption, incompetence – were also to be found in its armed forces, particularly those that defended the rump of Tsar Nicholas II's empire in East Asia.

The disagreement between Japan and Russia over the latter's encroachments in Manchuria led to much diplomatic wrangling that lasted



A column of Japanese infantry marching through Tokyo on their way to embark for the war, early 1904. They wear the M1886 dark-blue uniform and visored 'pillbox'-style hat, and all are equipped with 1887-pattern backpacks (made from thick unshaved cowhide stretched over a wooden frame) and carry Type 30 'Arisaka' rifles. The distinctive blue of the 'Meiji' uniform would quickly prove a disadvantage in combat, with most front-line troops being issued M1904 khaki summer uniforms from June 1904 onwards, though the 1886-pattern uniforms continued to be worn (whole or in part) throughout the war by many soldiers. (Library of Congress)

The war in Manchuria, 1904–05

MAP KEY

Manchuria, a rural north-eastern Chinese province of open plains and rugged mountains, found itself at the heart of a great power struggle between the two empires of Russia and Japan. The expansionist policies of one came into conflict with the protective requirements of the other, the fault line for their disagreement running through the Yellow Sea and Korea. Manchuria was a vast land, its centres of population (Harbin, Tieling, Mukden, Liaoyang, Dalny, Port Arthur) all found dotted along the Mandarin road. The central plains were broad and flat, fine territory for armies, but the eastern reaches of the country were beset with difficult mountain terrain that channelled movement into a few narrow passes. To the south lay the Liaotung Peninsula, jutting out into the Yellow Sea and home of the region's major strategic harbour, Port Arthur. Summers were hot and dry apart from the days of the rainy season which usually stretched through July and August, but winters were often extremely harsh. Roads were suitable for horses and carts and not much else, and were reduced to strips of mud during the winter thaw in February/March and then again later in the summer rains.

1 25 April–1 May 1904: In the wake of the Japanese surprise attack on the Russian fleet in Port Arthur on the night of 8/9 February, the Japanese First Army under Major-General Kuroki Tamemoto begins landing at Chemulpo in Korea. Marching with speed up the peninsula, the Japanese move through Pyongyang and on to the Yalu River, the border between Korea and China. There, Kuroki's army uses a blend of subterfuge and bold action to defeat the Russian Eastern Detachment, forcing its way into Manchuria.

2 5 May 1904: Japan's Second Army under General Oku Yasukata begins landing on the Liaotung Peninsula. The Japanese victory at the battle of Nanshan on 25–26 May leads to the fall of Dalny and the isolation of Port Arthur.

3 14–15 June 1904: The Russians attempt to open up the road to Port Arthur, but are defeated at the battle of Te-li-Ssu, withdrawing to the north.

4 10 July 1904: The Eastern Detachment is outflanked and outfought at the Motien Pass, one of the key defensive positions on the Antung–Liaoyang road. A subsequent Russian attempt to recapture the pass is firmly rebuffed.

5 7 August 1904: General Nogi Maresuke's Third Army begins its assault on the landward defences of Port Arthur, but the going proves to be far bloodier than expected.

6 26 August–3 September 1904: The battle of Liaoyang is fought, resulting in a Russian defeat and tactical withdrawal to the north.

7 11–17 October 1904: A Russian counter-offensive leads to the battle of Sha-Ho, resulting in a further defeat for Russian forces, which retreat to the north once again.

8 2 January 1905: Port Arthur surrenders to the Japanese.

9 25–29 January 1905: The Japanese defeat another Russian counter-offensive at the battle of San-de-pu.

10 20 February–10 March 1905: The battle of Mukden is fought, the largest military encounter in recorded history up to that point. The Russians lose and withdraw, though the strategic outcome is a stalemate, with the Japanese forces too exhausted to continue while the Russian Empire, beset with internal strife, has lost all interest in continuing the war. On 5 September 1905 the Treaty of Portsmouth brings the war to a formal conclusion.

for the better part of 1903, with wilful Russian obtuseness almost entirely responsible for the eventual failure of negotiations. The Japanese position was aimed at securing a buffer zone in north Korea that would give them some security against the Russian presence in Manchuria, but even the most reasonable of Japanese overtures had been rebuffed. Certain that nothing could come of further talks, Japan, already steeled to the prospect of fighting a major war, broke off diplomatic relations with Russia on 6 February 1904. Even at such a pass the Russians considered Japanese belligerence to be empty posturing, assuming that no minor power would dare engage the proven might of their fleets and armies. Not for the first time the Tsar and his counsellors would demonstrate an almost complete ignorance of their opponent's character, a failing that would be fatally compounded by their underestimation of his capabilities and the depths of his ambition.



MANCHURIA

Gulf of Liaotung

SOUTH MANCHURIAN RAILWAY
MANDARIN ROAD

LIAOTUNG PENINSULA

KOREA

Yellow Sea



0 25 miles
0 25km



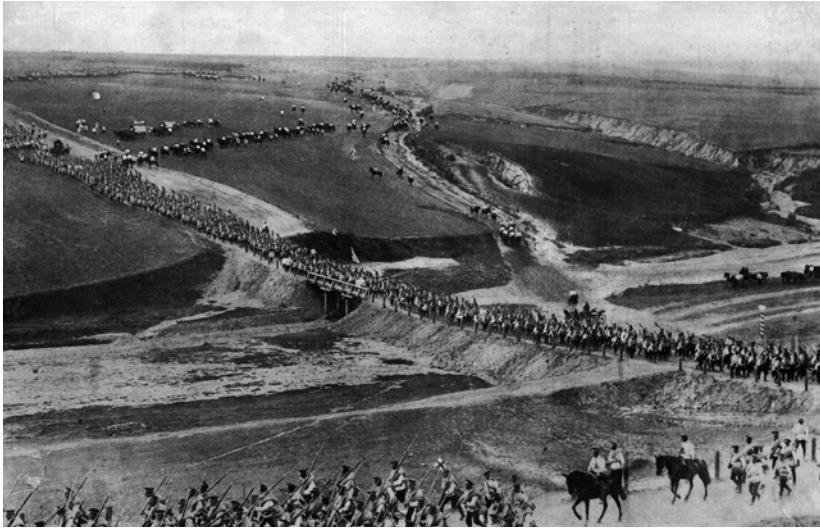
The Opposing Sides

ORIGINS AND RECRUITMENT

Russian

The Imperial Russian Army that faced the Japanese in 1904 was the largest army in the world, 3,500,000 men strong when fully mobilized. After its iniquitous performance during the Crimean War (1853–56), a series of reforms had gone some way to modernizing weapons and training, changes that showed to good effect in the Russo-Turkish War from which Tsar Alexander II's forces emerged victorious. Despite the Army's prestige, size and reach at the dawn of the 20th century, it was weakest in East Asia, in the one corner of the Russian Empire where war was becoming increasingly likely. At the outset of hostilities on 8 February 1904 the Russians had 3,115 officers, 147,479 men and 266 guns in the region, seemingly a large force but one which included railway security troops, Frontier Guards and militia units, all spread out between Vladivostok and Port Arthur (Ivanov & Jowett 2004: 15); the primary focus of such a force was to police existing territory rather than defend it from a serious external attack.

Throughout the fractious negotiations with the Japanese in 1903 no serious efforts were made to reinforce the eastern divisions, or to engage in the necessary work to ensure that support would be available in a time of crisis. The logistical issues of trying to properly equip, reinforce or expand the eastern detachments were considerable, relying entirely on the Trans-Siberian Railway and its choke-point at Lake Baikal. The army in East Asia was traditionally something of a backwater, despite its obvious and growing strategic importance to Russian designs in Manchuria. Siberian army corps were smaller than their European counterparts, with a much-reduced cavalry contingent and fewer guns as well. In addition, the Siberian regiments tended to be a dumping ground for officers who finished at the bottom of their



A splendid panorama of an unidentified Russian division on the move, heading for a rail hub and then on to the war, likely in the late spring of 1904. The infantry show up clearly in their pale summer *gimnastorkas* (their dark caps lack sun covers, but they do seem to have visors, making it almost certain that this is an East Siberian unit in Manchuria), while a battery of artillery can be seen in the middle distance and a large body of cavalry stretches out into the background. (Library of Congress)

academy classes, or who had no social connections of any worth that could ease their passage into better postings, thus reinforcing the second-class nature of the units serving on the eastern frontier.

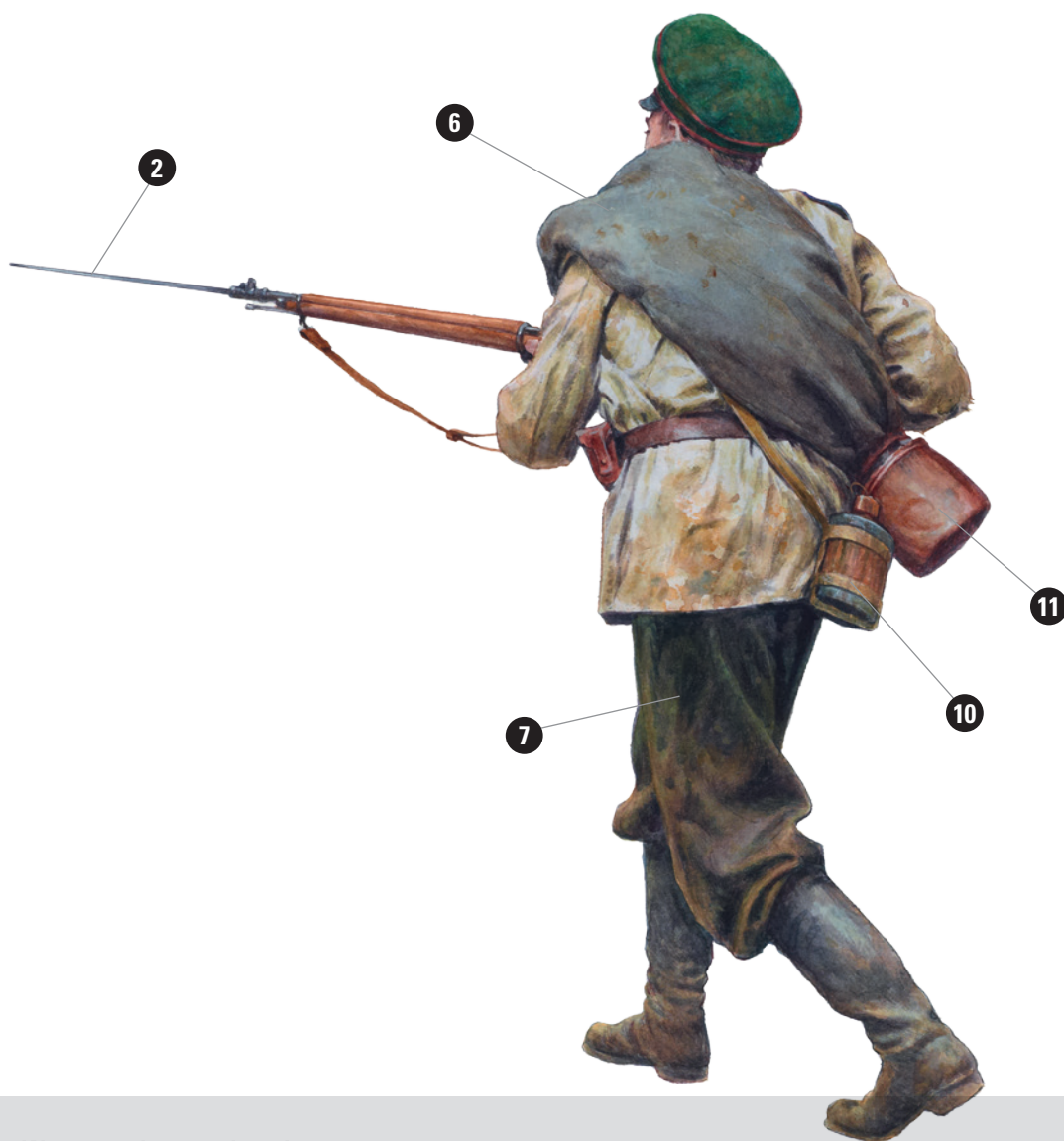
More importantly, the senior leadership of the Imperial Russian Army lacked the character and the will needed to prosecute a modern campaign. There was a rather haphazard appreciation of the technological and tactical advances in modern warfare in the wake of the Russo-Turkish War, with many senior officers more concerned about social affairs and byzantine army politics than with the responsibilities of their profession. Such attitudes were reinforced by the hidebound nature of promotion which relied upon precedence and connections rather than ability, a situation that led to a concomitant reduction in individual initiative and responsibility (Connaughton 2003: 33).

The Imperial Russian Army's active component consisted of a standing force of around 1,000,000 men, its numbers replenished each year by a new draft of conscripts. On 1 January 1874 Tsar Alexander II signed the new provisions for recruitment into the armed forces, stipulating that the whole male population was subject to military service, without distinction or conditions, from 21 years of age. The service life in the Army was 15 years – six years of active service and nine years in the reserve (in the Imperial Russian Navy the term of active service was seven years); the new law did not apply to the ethnic populations of Cossacks, the peoples of Transcaucasia, Central Asia and Siberia. Though it seemed all-encompassing and punitive, the new system of conscription was a considerable improvement on the previous version where a proportion of the peasantry were dragooned into service for a period of 25 years – effectively a death sentence as far as their families were concerned. Thanks to the system of benefits introduced during Tsar Alexander II's military reforms, only about 30 per cent of men were actually liable to be called up, all the rest falling under the age limit or benefiting from an exemption (single sons, orphans, those destined for the clergy, etc.). Lots were drawn among those who remained eligible, and the men chosen were inducted into that year's draft. This organization could be supplemented by a militia that consisted of all those between 20 and 40 years of age capable



This infantryman, a *ryadovoy* (soldier 2nd class) of the 12th East Siberian Rifle Regiment (raised in 1898 and part of the 3rd East Siberian Rifle Division), advances in a counter-attack, a last desperate attempt to throw back the Japanese who have forded the river and ejected the Russians from many of their defensive positions. The soldier is older than most, being a reservist, his years weighing heavily on him. He is unkempt, the result of living in the field for a prolonged period of time, and his uniform – like those of many of his compatriots – is extremely shabby, having seen better days.

The Yalu River, 1 May 1904



Weapons, dress and equipment

He is armed with an M1891 Mosin-Nagant rifle (1) with its bayonet permanently affixed (2), removing the need to carry a scabbard; the habit of keeping the bayonet fixed was supposedly an indication of the Russian soldier's faith in cold steel, and would remain the case right through to the end of World War II.

He sports the ubiquitous dark-green forage cap known as a *furashka* (3). The rather battered example worn by this private is peaked (something only common among Siberian regiments during the early stages of the war), and does not have its white summer cover; the cap's dark-green band identifies him as a soldier of his division's fourth regiment. He wears an 1881-pattern *gimnastorka* (4) that replaced the dark-green tunic during service in warmer weather. The once-white *gimnastorka* is now a pale off-khaki colour, the result of being dyed in an attempt to make it

less conspicuous. The shoulder straps (5) are dark blue (indicating that he is from his division's second brigade, the two regiments of the second brigade having blue tabs) and are marked with his regiment's number: '12'.

His grey-brown *shinel* (greatcoat; 6) is rolled into a horseshoe and carried over his left shoulder, its ends tied off and shoved into a mess tin on his right hip. His baggy dark-green *sharovari* (trousers; 7) are tucked into his *sapogi* (soft black leather boots; 8). His equipment consists of a plain brown leather belt, a pair of M1892 cartridge pouches (9) which hold 30 rounds each (a further 24 rounds being carried in his pockets for a total of 84), an M1885 wooden canteen (10) slung on his right hip, and an M1897 *kotelok* (copper mess tin; 11). Including his pack, the total weight of his equipment comes to around 28kg.



Siberian sharpshooters, recruited from some of the best regiments of European Russia for service in Manchuria, probably from March 1904. The difference between the pale bluish-grey of the officer's greatcoat and the earthier colours of those worn by the men is all too apparent. Several of the soldiers also wear *bashlyks* (traditional conical hoods made of camel wool that are not a part of the greatcoat), the lappets of which are worn crossed over their chests and tucked into their belts; the pale band of cloth that some men wear crossed over the left shoulder is a shelter-half. (Library of Congress)

of bearing arms, including those who had fulfilled their reserve obligation, though it would only be called up after the reserve, and even then only in dire emergencies (Ray 1961: 586). Reservists, especially the older ones, could prove to be thin beer, particularly when contrasted with the active service men of the regiment. Captain L.Z. Soloviev of the 34th East Siberian Rifle Regiment thought that

As a general rule, these uncouth, heavy bearded men look discontented, are clumsy, slothful, and cowardly. Their propensities are anything but warlike; they like to sleep well, eat their fill, raise a fuss behind one's back, while in battle they are too quiet. In addition to this, forgetfulness of military service, their years, thoughts about their family – all these causes and aspirations are not those which inspire a man at the critical moment and prompt him to throw himself against the enemy's bayonets. On this account the old reservists are not the element necessary for the attack, reconnaissance, or patrol service, where élan and presence of mind are needed. (Soloviev 1906: 46)

Japanese

The rapid development of Japanese arms in the latter half of the 19th century necessitated a great deal of observation of and help from foreign exemplars. The need to 'westernize' Japan's military culture and practices was championed by several Japanese politicians, one of the most important of whom was Ōmura Masujirō, an influential teacher at the Chōshū Military Academy during the early 1860s and later *hyōbu-taiyu* (vice-minister of Military Affairs) in the new Meiji government. Among the positions he most strongly advocated were: a universal conscription system; a concomitant reduction of the specialized role and privileges that the Samurai enjoyed in making war; standardized equipment and modern weaponry; military academies to train both non-commissioned and commissioned officers; and a new force structure for the Army modelled on the pattern then employed by France (Drea 2009: 21). Ōmura was assassinated by a clique of ultra-reactionary Samurai in late 1869, but his ideas did not die with him, with the new Meiji government following through on the development of a new style of navy and army. At sea Britain's Royal Navy, by far the world's most powerful maritime force, was



A line of Japanese infantry in their 1904-pattern summer khaki uniforms waiting for a Russian cavalry attack on a hillside near Fakumen, swords and bayonets much in evidence. Though the usefulness of the bayonet was being called into question in an age of accurate, magazine-fed, long-range rifles, there was much evidence of its continued utility for both sides during the war, particularly during night attacks and the close-quarter fighting experienced in places such as the mountains that surrounded the Liao plain and Port Arthur. At the first battle of Motienling on 4 July 1904, one Japanese outpost of 36 men suffered 15 killed, every one by bayonet, while Western military observers saw numerous cases of similar wounds and even some examples of swords still being used in close fighting, in one case by Major-General Akira Watanabe, the commander of the Guards Division's 2nd Brigade, who used his sword to dispatch an opponent during a night attack. (George Rinhart/Corbis via Getty Images)

the model to be emulated, while for the Imperial Japanese Army, Emperor Napoleon III's *armée française* was taken as the example to follow – at least until France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), after which the victorious Germans gradually supplanted the French in Japanese affections.

The first tests of Japan's forces were all internal, dealing with fractious remnants of the Restoration Wars and, most seriously, the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877 that stretched the capabilities of the new Army to its very limit. These domestic upheavals had the signal effect of demonstrating to the Japanese where their military system was underdeveloped or not fit for purpose, and encouraged a significant expansion in the size of the Imperial Japanese Army (which until then had a peacetime establishment of 32,000 men), but also an overhaul of weapons, tactics and drill, now all increasingly following the system of the Imperial German Army. In the wake of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) the Imperial Japanese Army underwent a significant expansion, effectively doubling in size; beginning in 1898, it would consist of one Guards and 12 infantry divisions plus two cavalry and two artillery brigades, a process that was complete by 1903 (Drea 2009: 93).



This infantryman, an *ittōhei* (soldier 1st class) of the 12th Division's 14th Infantry Regiment, makes his way towards the Russian positions on the western side of the Yalu River. Like a significant number of his fellow soldiers he is wiry and tough; this man, being a veteran of the First Sino-Japanese War, fought across much the same ground in Manchuria ten years earlier, after which he joined this newly raised division. He is dusty from the long march to get to the battlefield, his uniform freshly spotted and smeared with grime from the rigours of advancing across the Ai River, before climbing the ridges to meet his enemy.

The Yalu River, 1 May 1904



Weapons, dress and equipment

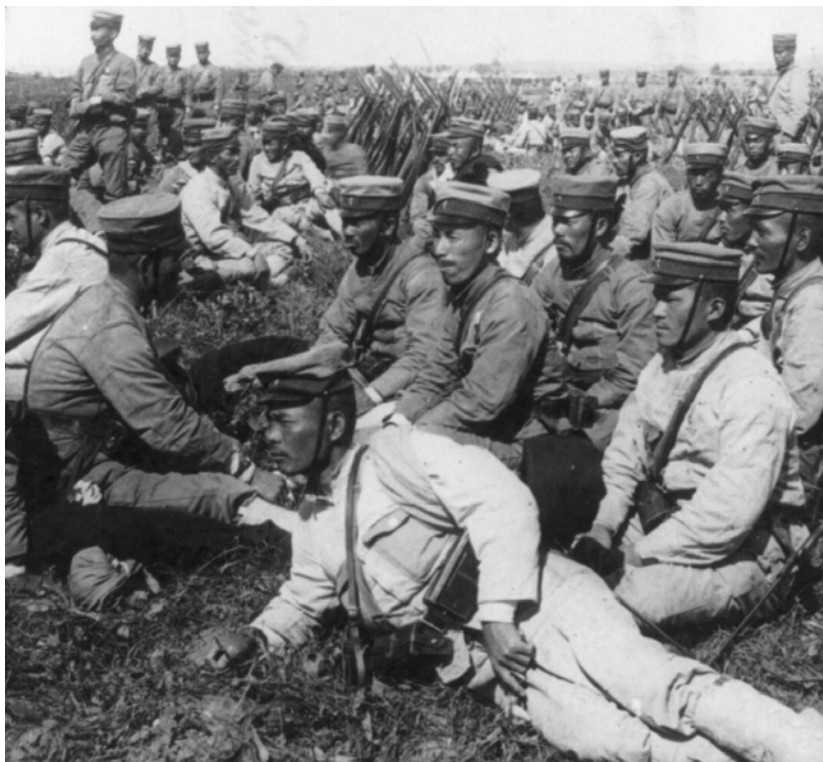
The infantryman carries a Type 30 'Arisaka' rifle (1) with its Type 30 bayonet attached, a modern firearm but one with a number of teething problems that affected its reliability in the war.

He wears an M1886 'pillbox' visor cap (2), and the dark-blue M1886 'Meiji' uniform tunic (3); the scarlet shoulder straps mark him out as an infantryman, his unit number – '14' – is pinned to them in white metal; the two narrow yellow stripes on his sleeves (4) identify his rank. His trousers are dark blue and his lower legs are covered by white gaiters (5) that sit over brown leather hob-nailed shoes.

He is equipped with an 1887-pattern backpack (6) which contains three days' rations, an extra 30 rounds of ammunition and spare

socks and underwear, other sundries and personal items; the soldier's greatcoat (7) is wrapped around the pack, which also sports a canvas shelter-half (8) and a mess tin (9). His leather belt supports three Type 30 ammunition pouches, two positioned either side of his buckle (10), with the third sitting in the small of his back (11); the two front pouches hold 30 rounds apiece, with the rear pouch holding a further 60 rounds, as well as an oil bottle and several tools to help maintain his rifle. He also carries an M1897 *zatsuno* (bread bag; 12); an 1898-pattern canteen (13); and a bayonet scabbard suspended from a leather belt frog (14). The total weight of his weapon, pack and equipment comes to around 23–24kg.

Japanese soldiers from the 9th Infantry Regiment (4th Division) relax as they await orders to advance, probably taken during the late summer or early autumn of 1904 during the siege of Port Arthur. Note the variations in shade of the khaki uniforms – it is possible that the soldiers in the lighter clothing are wearing either fatigues or the 1900-pattern summer drill uniforms which were made of white cotton, though by this stage of the war they were usually only worn by reservists in Japan. Also note the breast pockets on the tunic of the soldier reclining in the foreground – summer uniform jackets did not have external pockets, but it seems that some soldiers made their own and sewed them on, as this man has done. The British Indian Army's military attaché to the Imperial Japanese Army, Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Hamilton, thought highly of the average Meiji soldier, noting that 'This Japanese army shows conscription at its best – a comparatively small number, picked out of several hundreds of thousands for physical fitness and aptitude at certain necessary trades. The army is the cream of the nation' (Hamilton 1905: 10). (Library of Congress)



Though the initial development of a westernized army followed a French pattern, from the outset the system of conscription followed the German example, and was first promulgated on 28 November 1872, though not enacted until the following year. The new law called for universal military service (officially termed *ketsu-eki*, literally 'blood tax'), for all men 20 years of age and in good physical condition, for a period of three years, followed by transfer to the reserve (Kublin 1949: 31). The system was generally unpopular with both Samurai and peasant alike, but it continued because it was politically useful in reducing the influence of the warrior class, it encouraged social levelling, and it was cost-effective (Drea 2009: 34). Reforms to the conscription system in 1883 and particularly 1889 considerably increased the numbers of men who were available for service in the Army and reserves, the objective being to establish a pool of trained soldiers capable of filling out the Army's divisions in the event of war. The period of active service remained at three years, with four more years in the reserves during which time the men would be called up once per year for a brief period of training to maintain their proficiency. Upon leaving the reserve soldiers automatically transferred into the national militia, which was only to be called on during times of general mobilization. A further pool of reservists, known as the first reserve and the second reserve, consisted of men not classed good enough for conscription into active service: the first reserve provided replacements to units during mobilization, while the men in the second reserve (men unsuitable for front-line service) were destined for logistical support units. Both first and second reservists underwent 90 days of basic training, with annual refreshers thereafter (Drea 2009: 67–68).

MORALE AND LOGISTICS

Russian

Everyday life in even an elite unit of the Tsar's army could be hard and unpleasant for its soldiers, a situation exacerbated in those units such as the Siberian regiments that were in rural rather than urban posts, literally at the end of the line. Abuse by non-commissioned officers (NCOs) was common, as was being cheated and beaten by one's own officers for any infraction or none. Soldiers saw very little of the men who commanded them, the officers tending to prefer to spend their time in local society, so the bulk of day-to-day activities were run by the regiment's NCOs; as for the company's NCOs (of which there might only be a sergeant major, the rest of the positions often being filled out by literate conscripts), there was scant oversight. Unlike many other European armies there was little sense of professionalism or *esprit de corps* among Tsarist NCOs, with the men more often than not left to their own devices (Bushnell 1980: 570). Despite such a parlous structure of command and control, on the field of battle many Tsarist regiments fought tenaciously under the direction of their officers, echoing the simple stubborn patriotism that had been a characteristic of Russian infantry throughout the 19th century. By the same token, once such formations lost their officers they tended to lose initiative and cohesion (Bushnell 1980: 572).

The logistical reality faced by Russian regiments serving in East Asia was that the Manchurian mountains and plains were a harsh environment within which to campaign, with a constant toll being taken on uniforms, weapons, equipment and men. Mules and donkeys made better, hardier pack and draft animals than horses, which tended to fare poorly in the heat and rough conditions. Maps were generally poor, with many showing little other than roads and major cities, and then not always accurately; Russian regiments

Officers and men of the 23rd Artillery Brigade pose at Gatchina before leaving for the front, a journey made on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Originally ordered by Tsar Alexander III in 1882, the railway was still not entirely finished by 1904. It suffered from a number of problems, including the fact that it was only a single-track line, some stretches of which were built without the proper care and attention such an endeavour required, resulting in frequent derailments or the need for significant reductions in speed (average transit times over many sections were below 10km per hour, not appreciably better than a horse and cart). In addition, there was a choke-point at Lake Baikal where the unfinished tunnels through the cliffs on the lake's southern shore forced troops to disembark and pile onto ferries to transport them 64km across to the far shore (marching across the ice in winter), before re-embarking on the other side. Such a process was grindingly slow (there were only two ferries on the lake), especially when it came to moving supplies, heavy equipment and artillery (Jukes 2002: 16–17). (Library of Congress)



employed interpreters known as *vaska* to converse with the local Chinese to gather local intelligence as well as to get accurate directions, but they were generally much less able to glean help from the population than the Japanese were. Replacement of lost, damaged or destroyed weapons and equipment left much to be desired, but the provision of adequate supplies was generally good, with the Russian field kitchens (one per company, which cooked meals on the march so that the men had a hot meal as soon as they made camp) coming in for praise by several military observers.

Japanese

The new society being formed in Meiji Japan in the latter stages of the 19th century relied on several key elements, chief among them being reverence for the Emperor and a cult of unquestioning obedience to his personage and the dictates of his government, two things that were explicitly connected and portrayed as being one and the same by the ruling classes. For the Army conscript this manifested in the expectation of men to follow orders and even go willingly to their deaths in the service of the Emperor's will; a new slogan, *meiyo no senshu* ('honourable war death'), was coined to help create a sense of value out of such individual sacrifice (Shimazu 2011: 86). Despite such nostrums contributing to the image of Japanese soldiers as a homogenous mass in thrall to some Samurai-style cult of militaristic sacrifice, the reality was more complex. Conscripted soldiers were mostly peasants drawn from rural occupations, men who had little relationship to the centuries of Samurai warrior culture and pageantry that had specifically excluded such people from practising the arts of war. Conscription itself had never been particularly popular among those most likely to fall victim to it, and the majority of soldiers were likely ambivalent on their entry into the Army. Nevertheless, the extremely strong demonstrations of support that were held throughout civil society as the men prepared to depart for the front did help to create a sense of shared endeavour, with the process of transport during mobilization exposing many previously sheltered soldiers to the breadth of their nation, further reinforcing their sense of belonging to something larger than themselves (Shimazu 2011: 84–85).

In battle, Japanese infantry proved their dedication time and again in attacks that were horribly costly in the lives of men and officers. The shout of *Banzai* (a rallying cry that literally meant 'ten thousand years') became a defining symbol of group aggression and the willingness to prosecute attacks in the face of even very severe resistance. This was in large part a result of the Army's concentration on the importance of *seishin* ('fighting spirit'), something that was explicitly tied to one's duty to the Emperor as well as one's fellow soldiers and regiment, represented by the colours.

Japanese logistics relied on large numbers of local porters, hired at reasonable (sometimes generous) rates to assist with the transport of supplies and equipment; for example, over 10,000 were hired by Major-General Kuroki Tamemoto to support the advance of his 42,500-strong First Army from Chemulpo (Incheon) towards the Yalu River. Operating in a foreign land and without the benefit of the internal lines enjoyed by the Russians, the Japanese made more of local purchasing and supply, proving to be somewhat fairer and less rapacious than the Russians. Ammunition supply was taken



very seriously, with men carrying an extra 30 rounds in their packs to augment the 120 rounds on their belts, with great care being taken to keep adequate reserves available for units likely to engage in combat.

TRAINING, TACTICS AND WEAPONS

Russian

Training of new conscripts was conducted at the regimental level and was the responsibility of the company and battalion officers; though it was meant to include the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic as well as drill and military training, in reality only prospective NCOs received much in the way of education. The first four months of training saw the new conscript inculcated in the everyday realities of military life, from the hierarchy of his regiment to how he ought to look, move and behave; the same period also provided quick lessons on the bullying, extortion, theft, and myriad small

A Japanese soldier reloads his Type 30 'Arisaka' rifle in a trench during the Russian assaults on Sha-Ho (10–17 October 1904), a battle that would prove to be yet another Russian tactical defeat. Note the fur-lined collars and deep cuffs of the newly issued overcoats worn by all the men here; made from blanket material and lined with sheepskin or fur, the overcoats were voluminous enough to be worn over the soldiers' conspicuous M1886 blue greatcoats. Even so, these soldiers lack mittens and adequate footwear to cope with the Manchurian winter. (Library of Congress)

OPPOSITE

A Mosin-Nagant Model 1891 rifle manufactured in 1894. Officially known as the 'Three Line Rifle, Model of the Year 1891', it was designed as a replacement for the 1870 Berdan II, the single-shot 'Berdanka' being a reliable black-powder weapon chambered for a 10.67×58mmR round that fired a 24g lead bullet. The M1891 was usually carried with its bayonet fixed, which had a detrimental effect on accuracy (the additional weight of the bayonet not having been factored into the design) and gave the rifle an unwieldy length of 178cm. The M1891 rifle carried five rounds of 7.62×54mmR round-nosed ammunition in its single-stack box magazine which was loaded by stripper clips, and while it seemed as good a rifle as the Japanese Type 30 'Arisaka', in a post-war analysis the Russians themselves found it to be lacking in a number of ways including weight, recoil, mechanics and the heavier cartridge it used. Unlike the Japanese, the Russians failed to attend to most of these problems in the succeeding years, the early M1891 rifles used in the Russo-Japanese War being very similar in most respects to later versions of the rifle, including the M1891/30; aside from the move to a 'spitzer'-style bullet, the most obvious change would be the addition of sling slots in the stock, which first appeared in 1908. (© Royal Armouries XII.2663)

cruelties that were an endemic part of life in the Tsarist army (Bushnell 1980: 566).

Training and tactics were laid out in the Field Service Regulations of 1881, supplemented just before the war by the 1904 edition which had been heavily influenced by General Mikhail I. Dragomirov's 1900 'Regulations for the Co-operation of Detachments of All Arms'. Tactics still stressed the importance of group shock action over individual initiative, and though there was an increased focus on the importance of offensive rifle fire as well as a removal of the distinction between sharpshooters in the skirmish line and the main body of infantry, the regulations still favoured close formations despite the obvious growing lethality of modern weapons – dispersed troops were seen as being too difficult to control (Menning 1992: 138). In addition, the bayonet was still viewed as the key to forcing a battlefield decision, and the greater the dispersion of the attacking force the weaker the impact of the final bayonet charge would be.

Even so, the reality of a soldier's day-to-day existence in a regiment was not one of training and drill so much as it was a series of economic chores from crop-gathering, forestry, tailoring, gardening and boot-making through to working as stable-hands or officers' servants. Regiments were expected to be self-sufficient economic entities, generating their own food, uniforms and equipment, but the allowance they received from the commissariat did not cover all their expenses, so the soldiers were put to work, they and their regiments usually becoming an important part of the local economy. The reality of military life for a conscript was not so different from that of a serf on a large estate; both were subject to the seasonal nature of work, both were viewed as almost a different species by their officers and masters, and both had little incentive to work for anything but their own benefit. Training in manoeuvre and tactics was generally restricted to around two months in the early summer, though the effectiveness of such a routine in preparing a regiment's battalions and companies to operate together must have varied widely.

When occupying well-prepared defensive positions Russian infantry could be extremely difficult to dislodge, but the generally low level of training and a lack of tools meant that the impromptu earthworks or trenches thrown up by units during periods of manoeuvre were usually of poor quality and offered little protection. When going over onto the attack the infantry advance would be normally preceded by an artillery preparation of around an hour's duration – there was rarely interest in using the element of surprise or concealing the main object of the assault. An advance on an enemy position was divided into the approach and the attack. On approaching the enemy, the practice was still for battalions to deploy in depth (210m between the forward line, the company reserve and the battalion reserve), and advance across a narrow frontage of 280m (regiments would have a frontage of 700m), forming a skirmishing line at 1,400m from the enemy position. The skirmish line opened fire at around 1,000m, after which it would close in leaps and bounds until within 200 paces (142m) of the enemy, being reinforced by the reserves, whereupon the assault phase commenced, with both reserves and skirmishers charging home with the bayonet. This often proved much too restrictive in practice; companies (and on occasion whole battalions)

would instead advance in chain formation, each man ten paces (7m) apart, deploying some 2 versts (2,134m) from the hostile position, twice that if the enemy's artillery was active. The line would advance at the run where and when possible, often crouching and taking advantage of whatever cover the ground afforded. Attacks were still to be driven home with the bayonet, the utility of which was understood as much in psychological as in practical terms: it was assumed that, over and above the fear that bayonets caused in the enemy, they also gave Russian soldiers confidence in both defence and attack, encouraging them to engage in close combat when the situation called for it. Captain Soloviev noted that 'If our soldiers were not taught to look upon the bayonet as a final and inevitable recourse in each battle, he would probably abandon his position and not attempt to repulse the enemy with the bayonet' (Soloviev 1906: 24).

The value of machine guns was quickly appreciated, even if they were not always used well. The Russians used Maxim 'World Standard' machine guns mounted on carriages with limbers, and the Maxims were initially thought of more as a form of light artillery than as infantry weapons. A number of the guns, poorly sited and not well utilized, were captured by the Japanese in the wake of the crossing of the Yalu River in early May 1904, but it quickly became clear to the Russians that if used properly – that is, positioned in defensive strongpoints with good fields of fire – machine guns could exact a grave toll on attacking infantry or cavalry. In more static defensive situations such as at Port Arthur, the guns would be unshipped from their carriages and set on tripods in purposely constructed bunkers where they well-earned their grim reputation, though the Russians never succeeded in making the most of machine guns in an offensive role.

Night attacks were a common practice among both sides' forces, and each experienced the benefits (manoeuvre in more concentrated bodies of troops, freedom from directed artillery attack) and pitfalls (difficulties in orientation, unit cohesion and concentration) inherent in such tactics. It is notable that the balance of night fighting shifted decisively to the Russian defenders during the siege of Port Arthur, in part due to the narrow approaches that many of the Japanese attacks were forced to use, laying them open to more concentrated gunnery, grenade attacks, machine-gun and rifle fire, a situation exacerbated by wire entanglements and the Russian use of large spotlights to illuminate the attackers, all of which led to severe Japanese casualties.

The Russian artillery was well-equipped with a range of very good field guns and large howitzers, but time and again the Tsar's gunners found themselves outmatched by their Japanese counterparts. While some of the shortcomings can be attributed to haphazard utilization such as the positioning of batteries on exposed hill crests at the Yalu River, a more systemic issue was the generally hidebound nature of the artillery branch and the poor level of training given to the gunners, Captain Soloviev describing how

our artillerymen are unanimous in saying that our guns are excellent, much better than those of the Japanese. But the Japanese had been learning the ways of their guns for many a year before the war, while in our army some of the units made the acquaintance of the guns on the road and many were taught gunnery in the railway cars. (Soloviev 1906: 18)



An 1896 'World Standard' Maxim machine gun on a Vickers, Sons, & Maxim carriage that is very similar to those sold to Russia in the years before the Russo-Japanese War. Manufactured by the Maxim Nordenfelt Guns and Ammunition Company, the Maxim machine gun proved to be an increasingly popular weapon following its introduction in 1888, with orders from multiple countries, the British War Office proving to be one of the most important customers. The Maxims did not have model numbers in the modern sense and are generally known simply as 'World Standard' guns, the term under which Maxim marketed them. The Maxim's highly distinctive brass water jacket (as well as other fittings) came about due to the ease of casting and working with brass over steel, mainly for parts of the gun that were complex to manufacture and which did not have to sustain high pressures. The recoil-operated Maxim was fed by 250-round canvas ammunition belts; these encountered problems when they got wet, as the material would absorb water and shrink on drying, making it more difficult for the gun to extract the cartridge from the belt and thus increasing malfunctions. Even so, the Maxim was an enormously reliable gun that could fire almost indefinitely provided that enough ammunition was available and the water jacket (which kept the thin barrel cool) was continually topped up. (Ian McCollum / Forgotten Weapons)



Japanese

The initial model for the Imperial Japanese Army was that of the French Army, leading to the adoption of French tactics and the establishment of institutions such as the Toyama Infantry School, developed with the help of French military advisors and which became the centre of the new army's musketry doctrine and practice. As the 1880s progressed, the influence of France waned in favour of Germany, personified by Major Klemens Wilhelm Jakob Meckel, a tactician who arrived in 1885 and who would have a significant impact on the development of the Imperial Japanese Army. By 1891, infantry education and drill was standardized across all regiments, all units being trained on the basis of the 1884 German field manual, which stressed the role of junior officers, made company commanders responsible for the training of their conscripts, and emphasized the importance of the company echelon in tactical formations (Drea 2009: 59).

The Japanese principle of infantry attack was methodical, beginning with a detailed reconnaissance of the enemy position, followed by a rapid advance in a series of rushes to within 600–800m of the enemy line; at that distance a position would be established with rifle and artillery fire, and trenches dug. This position would be used to harry the enemy line and to dig parallels for the next stage of the attack, which would follow the same pattern as the initial assault (sometimes being undertaken under cover of darkness), moving closer until a final assault became practical once the Japanese firing line had drawn to within 100–200m of the enemy position; during the final period of such an attack the officers would move to the front of their units with their swords drawn to lead the charge home. A battalion's companies would advance in a variety of possible formations including echeloned column or line, and sometimes with its four companies abreast across a maximum usual frontage of 300m, a distance that would prove to be somewhat too narrow when moving against heavily manned positions or those supported by machine guns.

The Japanese use of machine guns was defined in large part by the fact that they were usually advancing and attacking more than they were defending.



A Japanese infantry company stands ready for battle in close-packed ranks, summer 1904. Japanese tactical doctrine was forced to adapt to the realities of modern weaponry, closed ranks giving way to extended skirmish lines. One captain in the Second Army observed that it was not the so-called 'human bullet' tactics that were responsible for so many deaths; rather it was the high quality of Russian fortifications and equipment, factors that were compounded by the dearth of Japanese machine guns, many more of which would be needed to ensure victory. (Drea 2009: 104). (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

The practice was to push the guns forward to the firing line where they could prove most effective in supporting attacks and defend against counter-attacks, but the lack of an integral gun shield for the Hotchkiss M1897 meant that the guns and their crews were vulnerable. The guns were transported on carriages but were unshipped and mounted on tripods for action, the crew being able to carry the gun and mount to reposition it or to move it forward for short distances in support of attacks. Once set up the guns could fire for hours at a time, the constant repetition causing not just casualties but also taking a toll on Russian morale, their nickname for the Japanese guns being the 'the devil's spout'.



A Japanese crew in 1904-pattern khaki uniforms in the process of working their Hotchkiss machine gun. The gas-operated Hotchkiss M1897 machine gun which equipped the Japanese was manufactured in Japan under licence, allowing each division to field 24 guns soon after the outbreak of the war. The gun was fed by 30-round strips of 6.5mm ammunition, the somewhat flimsy metal sections having much less capacity than a Maxim's canvas ammunition belt, but also being immune from the problems that those belts encountered when they got wet. The Hotchkiss was an air-cooled gun that relied on the weight of the barrel and its solid metal 'ribs' to absorb the heat of sustained operation, and was supposed to be 'rested' and swabbed down with water for a few minutes after every 1,000 rounds of continuous fire. The gun and tripod weighed around 55kg, making it easier to move and site than the Maxim. (George Rinhart/Corbis via Getty Images)



Hand grenades, first employed by the Japanese, were primarily used to help break up Russian bayonet charges, and were of a variety of more or less informal designs. They came into their own at Port Arthur where the need of the infantry to have a weapon that could clear bunkers, trenches and other fortifications was all too apparent. The grenades were locally made in improvised workshops and came in a number of different styles, some simple cylinders, others spherical, and some with handles to increase their throwing range; the Russians also made considerable use of hand grenades in defending their positions from the waves of Japanese infantry as they clambered up the slopes around Port Arthur, their versions being supplied by basic production lines that were established in the town and which turned out tens of thousands of the weapons during the siege.

The cavalry played a relatively minor role in what was to be for the most part an artillery and infantryman's war, with the British war correspondent Bennet Burleigh observing that 'The men at best are but poor riders, and the "screws" were unfit for either scouting or troopers' work' (Burleigh 1905: 22). Another assessment by the British military observer Colonel William Henry Birkbeck was less damning, considering the officers to be keen and intelligent, and the men superior to their infantry brethren, though he too noted the overall paucity of cavalry units, the variable quality of many of the horses and the scarcity of remounts. The low numbers of cavalry available, their mediocre mounts and a corresponding lack of horse artillery most likely hindered Japanese chances to exploit Russian defeats properly, denying the Japanese the opportunity to turn retreats into routs.

It was a different matter entirely where gunnery was concerned. The Japanese had been impressed by the effect of artillery during the Franco-Prussian War and established an artillery bureau in 1871 to oversee all aspects of ordnance. Though their field artillery was outclassed in both range and rates of fire by that of the Russians, the Japanese possessed several advantages, the most important of which was the training and competence of their gun crews. They paid particular attention to firing at specific targets (the Russian habit, by contrast, was often to saturate a general area with fire rather than take particular aim at discrete objects or enemy formations), made sure of their range, and spent time ensuring that the fuzes of their shells were correctly set; fire was marked with high-explosive shells, and rapidly corrected if needed. It was also noted that the guns often worked closely with the Japanese infantry, supporting them in the attack and engaging in counter-battery fire when they came under bombardment by Russian artillery.

The Japanese shrapnel shells for their field-artillery pieces were considered too light, but still proved to be superior to the heavier Russian version which was inconsistent on bursting, generally causing far fewer casualties than such a charge with a superior number and weight of bullets should. Captain Soloviev observed how a column of Russian infantry paid the price for marching in the open:

the Japanese have an excellent service of observation over the enemy ... As soon as the first company emerged on the plain and had shown itself as on the flat of the hand, it was suddenly encircled with the smoke of shrapnel explosions as with a mist. We could see clearly how the projectiles burst in the very center of the

column, dispersing the men; how they surrounded it as with a circlet of flames; how they exploded right in front of the column, in the very faces of the men; and how, as the troops advanced, the projectiles shifted, not losing aim for an instant. (Soloviev 1906: 6–8)

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS

Russian

In the early 1860s up to 70 per cent of Russian officers had no formal military education. From 1863 a series of four-year military schools were established that could guarantee 500 trained officers per year. In addition, between 1864 and 1871 a total of 17 cadet schools were set up, offering two-year courses. From 1888 a third variation – the ‘Cadet School with the Military School Course’ – began to appear, a hybrid of the two earlier institutions that indicated the gradual evolution of all cadet schools to the military school model, something that was finally completed in 1911 (Ray 1961: 582–83).

Sons of the nobility or of senior officers usually served in Guards regiments, but for the less well-connected or able, postings could involve being sent to desolate outposts or Siberian regiments. For officers posted to the eastern wastes, boredom proved endemic, the day-to-day work being left to the non-commissioned men. In such circumstances training and basic military routines were largely ignored unless an upcoming review demanded some semblance of action.

Senior officers could range from excellent to disgracefully incompetent, examples of such extremes being found in the form of the brave and intelligent Lieutenant-General Roman I. Kondratenko, as well as the hopeless Major-General Alexander V. Fock. Though there were numerous instances of hubris and the internecine squabbles of senior men spilling over into operational mistakes, the performance of many Russian officers, both junior and senior, left much to be desired. There were systemic shortcomings in ensuring basic competence, up-to-date training, operational readiness and military effectiveness, all exacerbated by the fact that the officers and men relegated to the Siberian regiments were already assumed to be less capable than their western Russian compatriots.

Russian telegraph networks together with the much newer telephone technology provided the backbone of communications at regimental level and above. Each Russian infantry and artillery regiment received four telephones and 6km of wire. There was some very limited Russian use of radio communication (from large mobile wireless transmitter stations), but this was towards the end of the war and was confined to relaying messages between the Imperial Russian Army’s supreme headquarters and its forces in East Asia rather than anything more operationally relevant. There was also some use of heliographs and to a lesser extent lamps (for day and night signalling respectively), as well as a semaphore network that had been adapted from the Imperial Russian Navy’s system, though it was likely of limited practical use.

At the company level orders were verbal, but in the din of battle it was nearly impossible for spoken orders to be heard even when men were standing

OPPOSITE

A Japanese 6.5mm Type 30 rifle, the primary weapon of the Japanese infantry during the war; it was also known as the ‘Arisaka’ after its designer, Colonel Arisaka Nariakira. First introduced in 1897, the Type 30 (so-called because it was introduced in the 30th year of the Meiji period) was inspired by the Mauser M1893 and M1895 bolt-action rifle designs, replacing the obsolescent 11mm Type 22 Murata bolt-action rifle that had been in service since 1889. With a five-round flush magazine, the Type 30 was chambered for the 6.5×50mmSR cartridge, a round-nosed bullet that proved to be underpowered and lacking in penetration. The rifle also suffered from a poorly designed locking mechanism that resulted in frequent jamming and maintenance issues, not helped by its susceptibility to dust and mud, leading to its redevelopment as the much better 6.5mm Type 38 bolt-action rifle in the wake of the war. Note that the horizontal ‘crack’ in the buttstock is in fact a design feature; Arisakas relied on low-quality wood, so their stocks were deliberately split, the lower portion being made from a separate piece of wood with the grain running in a different direction, thus making the buttstock less liable to toe-cracking. (USNPS Photo, Springfield Armory National Historic Site, SPAR 4245)

A portrait of General Alexei N. Kuropatkin. Fifty-six years old at the time of his appointment to the command of Russian forces in East Asia, Kuropatkin lacked the forcefulness of character and aggression that such a position required, and though he was guilty of some of the indulgences and prideful behaviour that beset the Russian officer corps, he had charm, plenty of personal courage, and was no fool. More importantly, he had a realistic sense of what the Japanese were capable of, treating his enemy with a level of cautious respect that was rare among his colleagues. Kuropatkin was a diligent officer who understood his strategic limitations, but could not overcome them. (Library of Congress)



right next to one another, so for junior officers the whistle was one of the most effective ways to communicate quickly and clearly with their men, provided of course the men had been well-briefed beforehand as to what the meaning of a whistle-blast was meant to signify – something that did not always happen (Soloviev 1906: 11).

Japanese

The Japanese opened a general staff college in 1882 and followed the German model demonstrated by Major Meckel, which stressed a general military education. The first year concentrated on languages, mathematics and drafting (for cartography and engineering); the second year covered military organization, mobilization, tactics and road-march formations; the third year focused on reconnaissance, strategy and military history (Drea 2009: 50). Meckel's approach found much favour, though his shortcomings (primarily an underappreciation of the importance of logistics) were also passed on; the German mission never exceeded seven officers, and thus it lacked the

depth needed to counterbalance Meckel's personal bias.

Branch schools were established to train specialist officers, while for those seeking an Army commission the pattern followed the German system: aged 13, cadets enrolled in regional preparatory schools and after three years moved to the central preparatory academy in Tokyo for a further two years. Cadets then spent six months serving in a unit (one year if they had not attended the preparatory academy), after which they became officer candidates, undergoing 19 months of education at the Imperial Japanese Army Academy followed by a final six months' duty with an active unit; if the candidate's service was satisfactory he would be commissioned (Drea 2009: 61). While other branches had technical schools for NCOs, in the infantry NCOs learned their trade 'on the job', following the example of senior men in their battalions.

Both junior officers and NCOs were expected to lead by example, especially in combat, resulting in significant numbers of casualties among the Army's junior leaders during the conflict. During an advance a staggered chain of four messengers relayed information between the firing line and the company commander, with a similar system connecting the companies to the battalion command post. Signal flags and whistles were little used, the exception being the raising of the 'Rising Sun' over captured objectives as a way of warding off friendly artillery fire. Contact between battalions and regimental or divisional command was by field telephone.

The field commander had a telephone unit, as did divisional commanders, who could communicate with army headquarters and one another (Kowner 2017: 530–31). Telephones used at regimental and battalion level aided the coordination of unit movement and artillery support; artillery observers would move forward with attacking infantry battalions (accompanied by signals units paying out telephone wire), allowing the officer to call in supporting fire that could be corrected in real time (Sisemore 2003: 77). At Port Arthur the Japanese developed a grid map of the Russian defences, field telephones allowing them to call down immediate artillery fire on predetermined sectors (all Japanese batteries being connected to the telephone network).

Signal flags accompanied every gun battery and were visible from 1,800m with field glasses. The flags were useful for detached units as well as for units on the move or after telephone lines were cut by enemy fire, but Japanese communication by semaphore was in its infancy, with no consistent system in use during the war.



A portrait of Lieutenant-General Kuroki Tamemoto. Sixty years old at the time of the campaign in Manchuria, Kuroki had led a division in the First Sino-Japanese War and had proved himself a capable, studious officer, suitable for appointment to command the First Army. His careful planning and the preparation of his forces in his advance on the Yalu River would demonstrate that the Imperial Japanese Army could outthink as well as outfight the Russians, much to the chagrin of the latter and considerable surprise of the world's other great powers. (Library of Congress)

The Yalu River

25 April–1 May 1904

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

War had caught the Russians unprepared. Their plans were incomplete and not well thought-through, in part because Tsar Nicholas II and his advisors had not expected the collapse of diplomatic talks to give way to military action so quickly. The basis of the Russian plan of action was to build up strong defensive positions at Port Arthur and Vladivostok with a screen along the Yalu River that would allow reserve forces to concentrate at Mukden until such time as overwhelming superiority had been achieved; then the Imperial Russian Army would advance, defeat such Japanese forces as could be found in Manchuria and Korea while the Imperial Russian Navy cleared Japanese ships from the sea, with the whole operation culminating in an invasion of the Japanese home islands. Only the first stage of such an ambitious undertaking had been properly planned out, however, not to mention the fact that the Imperial Japanese Navy showed no signs of accommodating Russia's maritime machinations (Menning 1992: 153). General Alexei N. Kuropatkin was given command of Russian land forces in East Asia, but he was subordinate to Admiral Yevgeni I. Alexeiev, viceroy over all of Russia's Far Eastern possessions and who was responsible only to the Tsar himself; the two men did not work well together, their differing ideas of how to fight the war exacerbating what had quickly become a fraught situation.

The most important problem faced by Kuropatkin was one which the Army's planners had simply not anticipated, and which could have potentially catastrophic consequences for the whole Russian position: he had no time. The Japanese declaration of war on 8 February 1904 was delivered even as the Imperial Japanese Navy was launching a surprise attack on the Russian ships at anchor in Port Arthur. That bold action shocked the Imperial



Russian Navy into a stupor, but it was only a prelude to a major Japanese landing at Chemulpo by Major-General Kuroki Tamemoto's First Army, which advanced on Pyongyang with alarming speed, reaching the city by 21 February. Russian military plans had anticipated plenty of breathing space within which to draw up their full might, but the rapidity of the Japanese assaults had made such casual calculations redundant. It would take months to transport the required reinforcements along the single track of the Trans-Siberian Railway, so Kuropatkin saw his best chance would be in a delaying game, stifling Japanese attempts to make rapid advances without committing himself to any major engagements. By such a strategy he aimed to build up his forces until he had a likely decisive advantage in numbers (at least 200,000 men) by the end of the summer, with no serious campaigning to be expected before August at the earliest.

The landing and advance of Kuroki's First Army demanded some sort of action, but Kuropatkin was loath to move a significant portion of his forces, then quartered at Liaoyang, when to do so would weaken his central position at a time when Port Arthur and Dalny (Dalian), 320km to the south, were still vulnerable. Kuroki would have to cross the Yalu River – the traditional border between Korea and Manchuria – but he was limited as to where he could do so: the river's upper reaches were fast-flowing and dominated by gorges and thick rain forest, and while the lower course was wider and lacked any bridges, the water was relatively shallow and broken up by a number of large sandy islands. There was a stretch of around 40km that was the likeliest area that the Japanese would choose for a crossing, and it was here that the Eastern Detachment, as Kuropatkin's defensive screen along the Yalu was known, was deployed. Kuropatkin's intention was for his command to do nothing more than delay Japanese progress, falling back as they advanced, relying on the difficult landscape that lay between the Yalu and the Liao plain

A unit of Cossacks parade for inspection prior to joining the war, 1904. Japanese cavalry generally avoided pitched confrontations with Cossacks, and even though much of the campaign was fought over terrain that was hardly conducive to dramatic displays of horsemanship several of the Western observers noted that the Russian cavalry in general were surprisingly poor; reconnaissance was rarely conducted, offensive operations were few and far between, and defensive actions were hamstrung by the effectiveness of Japanese artillery, which could almost always find cavalry columns due to the large clouds of dust raised by their passage. (ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

A column of Siberian infantry from an unidentified unit march across a ploughed field next to the corpse of a civilian, probably early in 1904. The men wear their 1881-pattern winter tunics with greatcoats rolled (the usual habit was to wear the greatcoat at all times when in winter dress, making this a relatively rare example of troops shown in their dark-green uniforms), the white bands of their peaked caps marking them out as the third regiment of their division, the peaks on their *furashka* caps indicating that they are a native Siberian regiment – western regiments wore the peakless version of the *furashka* until at least June 1904, though the changeover to the 'peaked' *furashka* was not formalized until the new uniform regulations were issued in 1906 after the war's end. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)



to provide plenty of opportunities for ambushes and holding actions; the ground was mountainous and offered an intelligent defender any number of opportunities to thwart the Japanese advance. Lieutenant-General Mikhail I. Zasulich, a man who did not share Kuropatkin's respect for their enemy, was appointed to lead the Eastern Detachment and arrived on 22 April. Kuropatkin's orders to Zasulich were straightforward: he was to delay the enemy but not become decisively engaged. Alexeiev also gave Zasulich orders, reinforcing the command to give ground as slowly as possible.

Kuroki's advance on the Yalu was so fast in large part because it had to be: General Oku Yasukata's Second Army was due to land at Dalny at the beginning of May, so it was necessary for the First Army to be over the river by then, forcing the Russians to deal with two simultaneous advances rather than simply relying on a holding force to keep Kuroki's forces bottled up at the river while the Russians concentrated on Oku's men. In addition, the rainy season was fast approaching, something that could turn a straightforward river crossing into a potentially disastrous endeavour. By 21 April Kuroki had the bulk of his forces concentrating on the eastern bank of the Yalu just to the south of the town of Wiju; their progress had been mostly free of Russian interference, the only resistance being some desultory harassment by a force of Cossacks that was brushed aside without too much trouble.

The Japanese had come prepared. Their experiences in 1894 during the First Sino-Japanese War led to the development of meticulous plans for how to approach and cross the Yalu, and included the design, transport and construction of a number of bridges; the islands that dominated the centre of the Yalu and its tributary the Ai would first have to be taken from the Russians, after which Kuroki planned to launch a major attack hooking



Japanese soldiers on the way to the front pause to enjoy a midday meal of tea and rice. Morale in the Japanese forces was high at the outset of the campaign and remained resilient despite the high cost of many of the victories enjoyed by the Japanese in the coming months. (The Print Collector/Getty Images)

around the Russian left with the 12th and Guards divisions, turning it, then forcing his way across the river to Chuliencheng with the 2nd Division. The plans had been drawn up in Japan before the outbreak of the war, and, local conditions notwithstanding, would be executed to the letter.



Expecting an attack from Russian cavalry, alert Japanese infantry stand-to at their position near Tehling, Manchuria. Note the two officers in the foreground, readily identifiable by their swords, sets of field glasses and the single line of piping that runs through the centre of their cap bands indicating that they are both company officers (also one wears puttees, the other gaiters, a small example of the freedom such men had in their modes of personal equipment and dress). Their men wear their dark-blue greatcoats rolled over their left shoulders and tube packs over their right; the tube pack was a popular alternative to the more formal 1887-pattern wooden-framed backpack, though it lacked the resilience and water-repelling properties of the latter. Both forms of pack were used extensively throughout the war. (Library of Congress)

The Yalu River, 25 April–1 May 1904

MAP KEY

- 1 2145hrs, 25 April–0400hrs, 26 April:** At 2145hrs two battalions of the Japanese 2nd Division cross in pontoons to Kintei Island, taking it unopposed. At 0400hrs, 250 Japanese Guardsmen row towards Kyuri Island, encountering some light resistance before it too falls.
- 2 26 April:** Japanese engineers begin construction of the diversionary bridge across the Yalu, drawing the fire of Russian batteries for the next four days.
- 3 0300hrs, 30 April:** The Japanese 12th Division crosses from Sukuchin to Anpingho. After brushing away some desultory Russian resistance the division begins its advance on the Russian left flank.
- 4 0000hrs–1000hrs, 1 May:** The 2nd Division, followed by the Guards Division, crosses the Yalu and both establish positions on Chukodai Island, linking up with the newly arrived 12th Division. Finding the Russian guns to be less of a problem than anticipated, Kuroki orders a general advance of all three divisions at 0700hrs, with the 2nd Division taking Chuliencheng by 1000hrs.
- 5 1400hrs–1730hrs, 1 May:** The Eastern Detachment, outmanoeuvred and overwhelmed, retreats towards Hamatang. A portion of the Russian force is cut off in the gorge to the south of the town, and is forced to surrender.

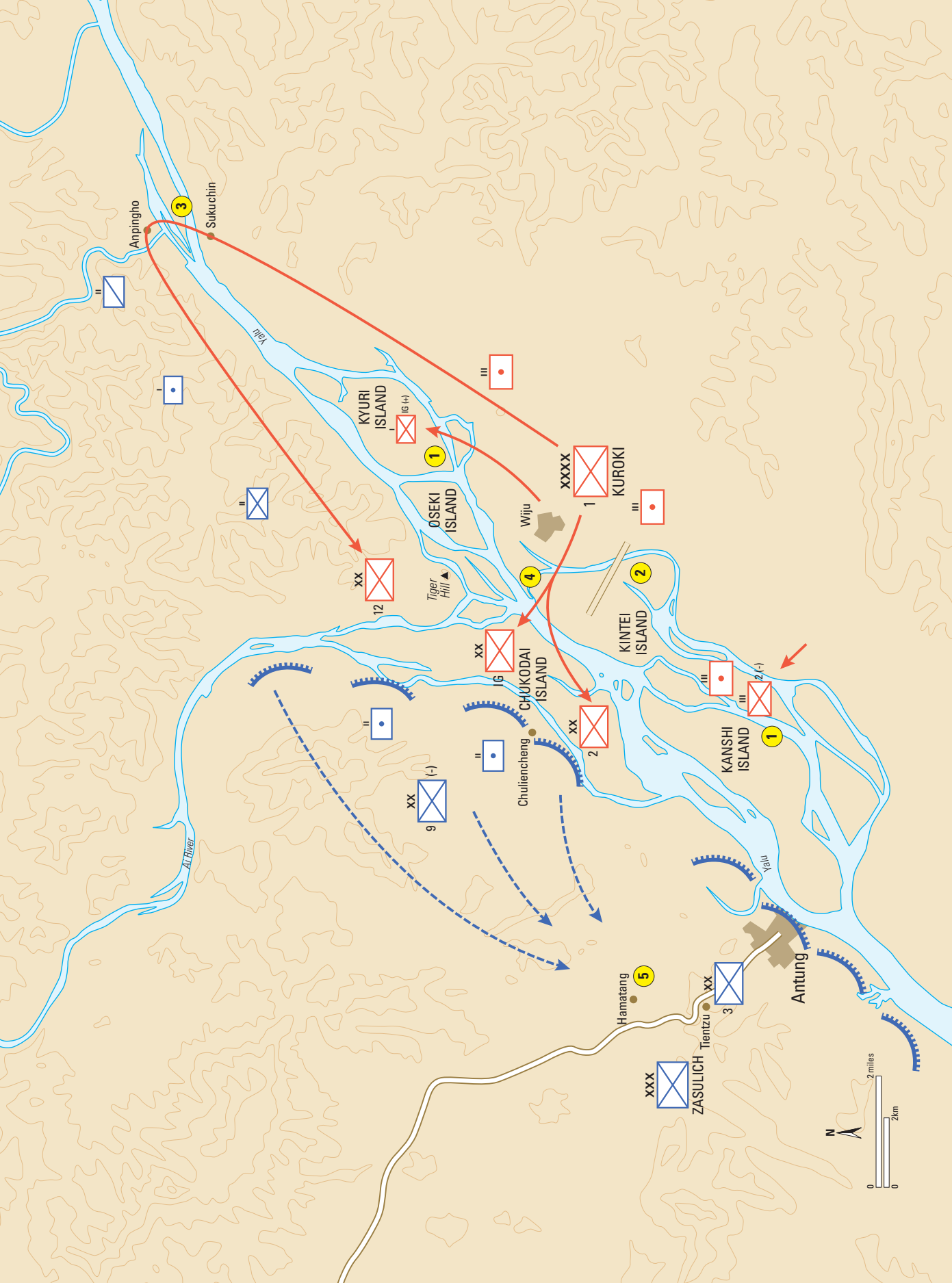
Battlefield environment

The river valley was around 6,000m across, its centre dominated by the wide passage of the Yalu and a branching river, the Ai, that joined the Yalu's western edge; the waterways were relatively shallow, less than 2m deep in some places, though generally unfordable, and were dotted with islands and sandbanks, some coated with low trees and a covering of thick scrub. Other forms of cover were sparse, mostly consisting of patches of dead ground in the sandy flats and under the banks of the rivers – the British military attaché in Tokyo, Lieutenant-Colonel C.V. Hume, described the view from the Russian

positions on the western side as looking out onto an open book, with clear lines of sight for several thousand metres in every direction (Hume 1907: 17). An isolated outcrop of rock known as Tiger Hill stood around 61m high on the Russian centre-left, while the remaining hills were mostly a series of spurs running down towards the Yalu from higher ranges in the rear, often ending in steep-sided knolls 45–60m high that overlooked the river. A few of the hills were stony and bare, but most were covered with broad stretches of scrubby brush.



The Yalu River being crossed by the Japanese Guards Division, captured in an engraving after a photograph, from the periodical *L'Illustration*, 14 May 1904. In late April the river would have been at almost its lowest ebb, meaning the river was fordable in several locations; the large sandy islands that dominated its main channel (and the Ai) were fully exposed, making the crossing of the 350m-wide river a far more realistic prospect. Even though infantry could navigate the waters between some of the islands, the bridges allowed faster and more organized progress, and were a necessity for the movement of guns and the rest of the army baggage train. (DEA / BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA / Getty Images)



INTO COMBAT

Lieutenant-General Zasulich's force consisted of 16,000 infantry, 2,350 cavalry, 640 *okhotniki* (mounted scouts) and 62 guns (48 field guns, eight mountain guns and six horse-artillery guns). The bulk of the men came from the 3rd East Siberian Rifle Division under Major-General Nikolai A. Kashtalinski (9th, 10th, 11th and 12th East Siberian Rifle regiments (ESRRs) and three batteries from the 3rd East Siberian Artillery Brigade, plus one machine-gun company, attached to the 9th ESRR), the 6th East Siberian Rifle Division (less the 21st ESRR) and the Trans-Baikal Cossack Brigade. Kashtalinski was responsible for the defence of Antung with 2,580 infantry, 400 *okhotniki*, two batteries (16 field guns) and eight machine guns; a reserve of 5,200 infantry and two more batteries were at Tientzu 6.5km to the north; Major-General Trusov was positioned in the centre with 5,200 infantry, 240 *okhotniki* and two batteries at Chuliencheng; the right flank was held by Major-General Pavel I. Mishchenko with 2,400 infantry, 1,100 cavalry and two batteries (eight field guns and six horse-artillery guns); the left flank, which was anchored at Anpingho and stretched for dozens of kilometres to the north-east along the banks of the Yalu, was guarded by only 1,000 infantry, 1,250 cavalry and one battery of eight mountain guns (Connaughton 2003: 75).

Kuroki's First Army consisted of the Guards Division as well as the 2nd and 12th divisions, around 42,500 men in all. The force was well organized, trained and supplied, and its officers and men had been thoroughly suffused with the exhortation of General Kodama Gentarō (Chief of General Staff of the Manchurian Army) to do their utmost to win the first battle of the war no matter what. As the Japanese scouts approached the Russian positions on the Yalu it became clear that Zasulich was intent on demonstrating the strength of his arms; his trenches, freshly dug at the base of the hills on the western bank of the river, were uncamouflaged, as were some of his artillery batteries, clearly delineated on the crests of those self-same hills. The British military observer Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Hamilton, travelling with Kuroki's army and an eyewitness to the battle, noted that

epaulements had been constructed for twelve guns just above Chiuliencheng on the top of a low hill. The Russian engineer or artilleryman who designed this target must have taken his idea from his grandfather's text-book ... There was a flimsy parapet, just enough to attract attention, not enough to give cover, and there was no trench or place of refuge for the *personnel*. Nothing could have been worse, for the great essential nowadays in any such prepared positions is sunken, shell-proof cover for the men, and after that, cover from sight, and, as much as possible, from shot, for the guns. (Hamilton 1905: 90–91)

Such boldness was augmented by the considerable intelligence the Japanese had already amassed on their enemy, much current information coming from Japanese scouts masquerading as Korean fishermen, giving Kuroki an unparalleled advantage over Zasulich. Despite such ready information on his opponent, the intelligence reports also let Kuroki know that the shape of the islands and waterways of the Yalu had changed a good deal in the ten



years since the First Sino-Japanese War, forcing some radical re-engineering of the bridging equipment that the First Army had spent so much time and effort constructing and transporting in secret, made much easier by the commandeering of abandoned supplies of Russian timber. By 25 April the new bridges had been put together, and Kuroki was ready to move.

The Russians were almost entirely ignorant of the strength of the enemy that opposed them; though they had strong suspicions that the Japanese might try a crossing at Antung, the location that their armies had used against the Chinese in 1894, there was no certainty on the matter. The first 2,500 Japanese troops of the advance guard had arrived at Wiju on 8 April, but the Russians made no attempt to dislodge them, only sending a paltry reconnaissance party of 50 men to investigate their presence there on 12 April; the tiny force was thrown back with two dead, after which no further efforts were made to learn any more. That the main Japanese body had arrived by 20 April was clear enough, but large screens of *kaoliang* (the local variety of millet) were erected along the exposed sections of the eastern bank of the Yalu, hiding Kuroki's activity from the Russians. Though it was clear that his enemy was busy doing something, Zasluch deployed no scouts, conducting no reconnaissance short of observing the Japanese from his own positions. Even as late as the evening of 28 April, several days after the Japanese had begun their operations in earnest, Zasluch still had no clear idea of their exact dispositions or even the objectives of the troops that opposed him.

For Kuroki to reach the western bank of the Yalu, he would first have to take the rough sandy islands that dominated the central passage of the river, the most important of which were (running south-west to north-east) Kintei, Chukodai, Oseki and Kyuri. The Japanese made sure their presence was felt all along the eastern bank of the river, ensuring that the Russians, spread out over a distance of 40km on the opposing bank, remained ignorant of Kuroki's intentions. On the night of 25/26 April Kuroki struck, with elements of the 2nd Division seizing Kintei Island while 250 men of the Guards Division took Kyuri Island. The attack on Kyuri Island began at 0400hrs on 26 April, and was to provide the only semblance of Russian resistance to the Japanese attacks. A field gun and volleys of rifle fire lashed the Japanese Guardsmen in their boats as they paddled towards the island, killing or wounding around 30 of them, but the Russian aim was bad and did not overly hinder the attackers who, once they had landed, took the island with ease.

On the morning of 26 April some small actions by Japanese gunboats in the southern reaches of the Yalu were undertaken, theatrics to convince the

A column of Japanese infantry (likely from the 12th Division) crosses the Yalu using a pontoon bridge the day before the main attack, 30 April 1904. The majority of the bridges that Major-General Kuroki's engineers built across the Yalu and Ai rivers were of the trestle type constructed of fir trunks lashed and bolted together, the trestles spaced around 3m apart and over which a planked roadway was laid. The main exceptions were pontoon bridges, the largest of which stretched nearly 350m across the breadth of the Yalu's main channel; the bridge pictured here has almost certainly been laid between the eastern banks of the Yalu and the sandy islands that dominated the central passages of the river on the crossing from Sukuchin to Anpingho. (Library of Congress)

Mikhail Zasulich

Born on 24 December 1843, Mikhail I. Zasulich graduated from the Alexandrov Cadet Corps and the Konstantinov Military Academy, receiving his commission as a lieutenant in the Staringermanlandskiy Reserve Infantry Regiment in 1863. Quickly transferring to the Grenadier Life Guards Regiment, he was promoted to captain in 1876, serving in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78) during which he distinguished himself in a number of actions. At the war's end he was promoted colonel, receiving command of the Perm 101st Infantry Regiment in 1887. His rise continued smoothly, with promotion to major-general in 1894, commanding brigades in the 9th Infantry Division and 2nd Grenadier

Division before his appointment as the commandant of the Osowiecka Fortress in 1899. In April 1900 he was promoted again, this time to lieutenant-general, his elevation marking his new command of the 6th Infantry Division. Appointed to head up the 2nd Siberian Army Corps in February 1903, he found himself in East Asia at the outbreak of the war with Japan. His singular failure at the battle of the Yalu was followed by equally poor showings at the battles of Tashihchiao, Hsimucheng, Liaoyang and Mukden, where he proved himself incapable of effective command. Claiming illness, he left the Army in 1906, dying in 1910.

Russians that the main Japanese attack would be to the south. One unexpected corollary of the fall of the islands was the Russian abandonment of Tiger Hill, named for its supposed resemblance to a tiger crouching over the river below. It was a rocky promontory, the extreme point of the triangle of mountains which divided the Ai and the Yalu rivers, giving it excellent views – and fields of fire – across the whole of the Japanese position; and it could offer a similar advantage to the Japanese if it were to fall into their possession, allowing them to move against the centre or either flank of the Russian position. Despite its value, clear enough to some of the observers who witnessed the battle, the Russians had done little to fortify the hill, nor had they emplaced any guns there; in the face of Kuroki's advance they deserted it entirely, gifting it to the Japanese who quickly occupied it.

On 26 April the Japanese began construction of a large trestle bridge, eventually reaching 240m in length, stretching out from the river banks near Wiju across the islands towards Chuliencheng on the opposite shore. The work, started in daylight and in full view of the Russians, drew the first real fire from the Russian batteries on the western bank. For the next four days the Japanese would continue to build the bridge in open defiance of the Russian shells, the British observer Captain Berkeley Vincent noting how 'The Japanese engineers would not at first leave their work, but continued driving in piles and shouting "Banzai" as each shrapnel burst over their heads; but finally, the Russian fire became so accurate that the Japanese officers ordered their men to get under cover' (Vincent 1907: 51). This was just as Kuroki intended. The entire purpose of constructing the bridge in such a way and in such an exposed position was to wrongfoot the Russians; it was obvious that the Japanese would need to cross the river, so by showing Zasulich what he expected to see, it allowed Kuroki the time to continue construction of the real bridges (ten in all) that he needed to cross the Yalu and Ai rivers, while letting his enemy reveal all his batteries and waste his ammunition on a well-built red herring. In the event not a single Japanese soldier or shell crossed to the western bank using Kuroki's deceptive trestle bridge.

The Japanese wasted no time in bringing their artillery up, moving batteries onto the newly captured islands and emplacing them, ready for the

Inoue Hikaru

Inoue Hikaru was born on 8 November 1851, spending his early years as a young Samurai serving in the Seigitai militia during which time he took part in the Boshin War (1868–69), a civil conflict in which Inoue fought to secure the restoration of the Emperor Meiji against the last gasp of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In the wake of the war he joined the new army in May 1871 and quickly found himself running a battalion prior to a transfer to the staff of the Imperial Guard in 1874. He graduated from the predecessor of the Imperial Japanese Army Academy in 1875, was promoted major in 1876, and commanded a battalion in the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. A series

of staff appointments (including acting as the chief-of-staff of the Japanese Second Army during the First Sino-Japanese War, 1894–95) led to his elevation to major-general and command of the 3rd Infantry Division in 1898. Quickly promoted to lieutenant-general in March 1899, he was put in charge of the newly formed 12th Infantry Division, a command he would retain throughout that formation's constant engagement in most of the major battles of the Russo-Japanese War. Receiving the title of *danshaku* (baron) in September 1907, he was promoted to full general in August 1908, dying shortly thereafter.

next stage. Included in them were a regiment of twenty 120mm howitzers purchased from Krupp, Captain Vincent describing the installation of their five batteries on Kintei Island:

During the night of 29th April ... the howitzer regiment dug itself carefully into the sand of Kintei island, using every artifice to conceal its position ... The pits and epaulments, which were grouped in fours, were connected by trenches, and, judging by the number of covered ways to the river bank, water was largely employed as a means of laying the dust. Thus perfectly screened from view from the Russian positions, the howitzers were connected by telephone with two observation stations on the high ground, some three or four thousand yards [2.7–3.6km] in rear, whence the fire was directed on any particular part of the Russian position by a system of numbered squares. (Vincent 1907: 53–54)

The Japanese also built observation platforms in the stands of trees near their guns to help check the fall of their fire. The efficacy of their efforts at concealment and camouflage was shown by the fact that throughout the ensuing battle the howitzer batteries never received a single hit from a Russian shell.

The initial Russian dispositions, with a concentration of men and guns towards the south and centre of their position, had not changed with the capture of the islands over the Yalu, nor with the Japanese construction of the trestle bridge from Wiju. Beyond Tiger Hill there were fewer troops tasked with protecting a larger stretch of land, but despite a Japanese reconnaissance-in-force on 26 April by the 12th Division that crossed from Sukuchin to the western side of the river and took Anpingho, Zasulich remained calm, even if Trusov, with responsibility for the defences north of Tiger Hill, did not share his sanguine outlook.

With his ten bridges nearly built and the plan set, Kuroki issued orders at 1000hrs on 28 April for the general attack to commence on the night of 29/30 April. The only minor setback came the following day, when at 1600hrs on 29 April Zasulich ordered the 22nd ESRR and supporting elements to drive the small occupying force of Japanese off Tiger Hill, which

Russian infantry move up a slope in line as they conduct an attack on a Japanese position on high ground, summer 1904. The importance of driving home an attack at the point of the bayonet was becoming a matter of contention both before and during the war, firepower being seen by many as the deciding factor, but for Captain L.Z. Soloviev of the 34th East Siberian Rifle Regiment the utility of the bayonet was undimmed: 'As a participant in bayonet charges, I had occasion to see how the bayonet in a few short moments took trenches, against which thousands of bullets were fired in vain for three entire days. I have seen the condition of mind of the victorious soldier, noted his elation after a bayonet attack, and how decisive and relentless is the struggle from which emerge only the living victors and the dead vanquished. There is no middle path' (Soloviev 1906: 23). (ullstein bild/ ullstein bild via Getty Images)



they managed without much difficulty, though the resulting benefits accruing to the Russians were negligible – it was far too late to make the hill a defensive strongpoint, and as an observation post all it could provide was excellent views of Japanese manoeuvres that were already well advanced. In all other areas, Russian passivity in the face of Japanese activity continued in the same fashion as before, only the guns firing pointlessly on Kuroki's distraction doing much of anything.

At 0300hrs the next morning, 30 April, the rest of the 12th Division crossed over the Yalu at Sukuchin, scattering the thin Russian defences and establishing a serious threat to Zasulich's left, though the Russian general once again did little, failing even to redeploy troops to refuse his flank and only sending a single battalion and a handful of guns to bolster the defences. It is possible he thought the Japanese incursion little more than a feint, or even if he feared it was more than that he still felt it better to maintain the integrity of his detachment rather than dividing his relatively modest force in the face of a superior enemy who seemed to threaten crossings in several places. Later that day Japanese probes on Chukodai Island came under artillery fire from a Russian battery, an action that unleashed the might of Kuroki's guns; six batteries of field guns from the 2nd Division accompanied by the five batteries of 120mm howitzers on Kintei Island opened up on elements of the 6th East Siberian Artillery Brigade, destroying them in 16 minutes. A second Russian battery began firing and quickly suffered the same fate, the poorly sited, poorly protected guns and their crews being no match for the Japanese.

As the day wore on the situation worsened for the Russians, with even the small victory on Tiger Hill knocked back as the Japanese retook it by midday. The Japanese 12th Division, formed up and marching south towards the Ai River, was a constantly growing threat to the weak and overexposed Russian left. As the evening of 30 April closed in it was clear to at least some of the Russian commanders that the situation was becoming increasingly serious. Kashtalinski, who had taken over from Trusov after the latter fell ill, requested that he be allowed to withdraw the main force to the second line behind



Japanese soldiers manhandling cases of ammunition in support of a unit of the Guards Division engaged in a small skirmish near Fenghuangcheng (Wolf Hills). Japanese transportation was undertaken via four methods: regulation two-wheeled transport carts; indigenous Manchurian carts; pack ponies; and coolie-carts. A transportation cart had a load of 180kg, while local Manchurian examples varied in their capacity; ponies would carry 90kg of supplies in two pack chests for 19–29km per day, and coolie-carts (light two-wheeled rickshaw-like vehicles that were either drawn or pushed by the coolie) could manage 135kg loads up to 24km a day. (© CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images)

the hills of Chuliencheng, but Zasulich would have none of it, leaving the Russian dispositions more or less unchanged.

Starting at midnight on 30 April/1 May the 2nd Division crossed over a series of bridges and deployed for attack on Chukodai Island, closely followed by the Guards Division which deployed to the right of the 2nd Division, each digging in on either side of Chuliencheng. The Guards Division's right wing connected with the left wing of the freshly arrived 12th Division, leaving all three of the First Army's divisions established right in front of the Russian positions by 0500hrs, just as the morning mist began to lift. The guns of the 2nd Division had also been ferried across to ensure that they could offer the best possible support when the attack came, three batteries having entrenched by Chukodai village in time for the dawn, which saw a drumbeat of those guns, together with the howitzer batteries and the Guards Division's guns, pounding suspected Russian gun emplacements above the Ai; the little resistance the Russians offered was soon silenced.

With no serious opposition from the Russian artillery Kuroki decided on a general advance of all three divisions, which jumped off at 0700hrs. Progress

was swift, with neither sight nor sound of the Russians, one Japanese officer observing that 'When the enemy fires very heavily, it is unpleasant; but when he does not fire at all, it is terrible' (quoted in Hamilton 1905: 111). The lines advanced, fearing that the Russians were drawing them in, allowing them to get close enough to ensure that their riposte would be devastating, the tension finally being broken by a Russian battery that was silenced almost immediately by the guns of the Guards Division. As the Japanese closed with the Russian trenches at the Ai, the infantry battle was joined; the musketry of the defenders proved to be indifferent at first, volley after volley being fired for little effect. The 2nd Division's advance proved to be the quickest, the unit advancing on Chuliencheng in short order, but here the Russian fire took more of a toll on the closely packed and easily identifiable lines of blue-clad infantrymen. Weight of numbers and a more pragmatic approach to the use of cover paid quick dividends for the Japanese, with the division taking Chuliencheng and as a result forcing a general withdrawal of the Russian line, which began to fall back on Hamatang.

The back of the Russian line was broken, but many units conducted a fighting withdrawal, with more than one counter-attack, such as that by the 12th ESRR, being launched in an attempt to check the Japanese advance, but they were too few to make a difference. As the confused columns of Kashtalinski's men, guns and horses crowded along the gorge that led to Hamatang, the Japanese threw a cordon across the way out, hemming the Russians in. The result was some of the most severe fighting of the whole battle, the matter finally being decided by a Japanese bayonet charge. One Japanese infantryman recalled that in the rush of close combat he forgot his weapon was even loaded, instinctively striking out with his bayonet:

You want to use your bayonet with your arms, not your body. The Russky uses his bayonet with his body. He sticks his head down and rushes at you. If he catches you, you are spitted for good. He is such a big fellow that he lifts you fairly off your feet. If you are quick on our legs [*sic*], though, you can step to one side, and then you have him; the only way with little men with short arms is to get in close ... The first time I struck a Russian I could feel my bayonet grate on his bone ... I did not think of it at the time, but when I thought of it afterward it seemed very awful. I had seen him coming like a big black shadow, and I had just time to dodge, and I felt his bayonet go by my cheek like a razor does over your face. I pulled my bayonet out and sunk it in his neck before he had time to strike me. If I had not killed him he would have killed me. It is that way always. (Quoted in Palmer 1904: 316–17)

By 1000hrs the Russian position on the western bank of the Yalu was in Japanese hands, and by 1730hrs the whole of the Eastern Detachment was in retreat towards Fenghuangcheng (Wolf Hills). Losses were relatively modest, at least in comparison to what would come later, with 1,036 Japanese and around 2,700 Russian casualties. At least 22 guns from the 6th East Siberian Artillery Brigade were lost during the retreat, as well as all the Eastern Detachment's Maxims, the Japanese counting up a total of around 50 captured pieces of various calibres in the aftermath of the battle. The road to Fenghuangcheng – and beyond it Liaoyang – lay before Kuroki and the First Army.

Liaoyang

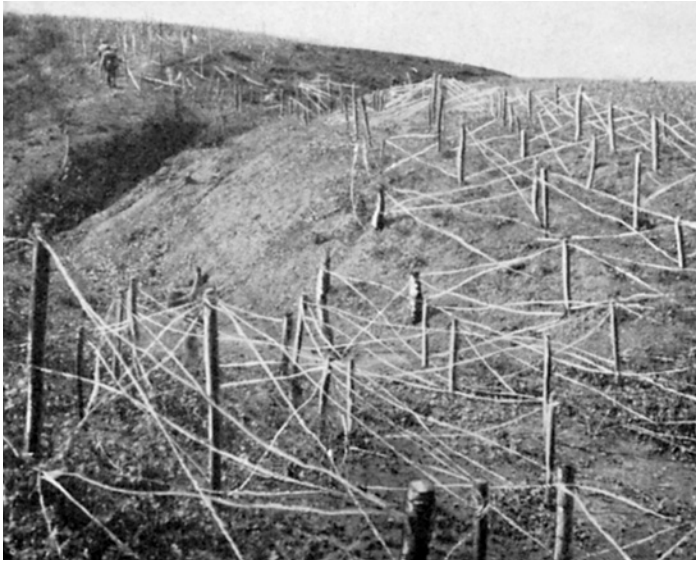
26 August—1 September 1904

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

The Japanese First Army had punched through the Eastern Detachment and crossed the Yalu, while the Second Army had made short work of cutting off the Liaotung Peninsula from Manchuria in general and Russia in particular. General Kuropatkin, still marshalling his strength at Liaoyang, was well short of the forces he felt he needed to confront one enemy attack, never mind two. Nevertheless, some sort of offensive action was called for, with Kuropatkin's more conservative opinions overruled by Admiral Alexeiev and Tsar Nicholas II's ministers. The Japanese threat to Port Arthur was seen as the most pressing issue, an instinct that resulted in the battle of Te-li-Ssu on 14–15 June 1904 where 30,000 Russians of the 1st Siberian Army Corps

Russian infantry march through Liaoyang during the early stages of the war. They wear the M1881 dark-green tunic and trousers together with the peakless *furashka* cap and carry their M1891 Mosin-Nagant rifles with bayonets attached, but are without greatcoats or packs. The officer to the left wears a large pistol holster on his right hip, suggesting that he carries the older .44-calibre Smith & Wesson No. 3 'Russian' six-round revolver as opposed to the newer (though arguably not better) 7.62mm M1895 Nagant seven-shot revolver. The M1881 winter uniform was usually worn under the greatcoat, with soldiers switching to the simpler 1881-pattern *gymnastorka* when the weather improved. (Library of Congress)





A set of Russian barbed-wire entanglements typical of those used throughout the war. Considerable use was made of wire obstacles in the protection of Russian front-line trenches, and also as a part of a layered defensive system such as those found protecting the forts around Port Arthur, which relied on a combination of trenches, wire, minefields, gun emplacements, machine guns, observation balloons and searchlights to create a well-monitored and ideally impassable stretch of terrain. Captain Soloviev observed that 'among all obstacles in field warfare wire entanglements have proved the most effective, being almost insurmountable and withstanding artillery fire exceedingly well. Wire entanglements present to the attacking party an obstacle very difficult to conquer' (Soloviev 1906: 29). (Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images)

point on the road from Antung to Liaoyang, its rugged terrain making it a gift for any defender, but Keller's force was outflanked with embarrassing speed by troops from Kuroki's First Army on 10 July; an abortive attempt to regain the pass later that month was easily rebuffed by the Japanese and cost Keller his life, struck down by a shrapnel burst.

Morale was poor among the Russians. All their offensive endeavours resulted in reverses that made their overall situation worse, while their enemy concentrated his forces as he advanced along two narrowing axes. Among the Russian high command there was much disagreement as to the best course of action: whether to hold on at Liaoyang, to set out and offer battle, or withdraw towards Mukden. Under pressure from Alexeiev, who was insistent that no opportunity should be lost in pressing for the relief of Port Arthur, Kuropatkin decided to stay and fight. His forces at Liaoyang were impressive, with 14 rifle divisions (five East Siberian and two European army corps) at his disposal – 158,000 men including 128,000 infantry, and 609 guns (Warner & Warner 1975: 354). What he did not know was how many men his enemy had, or what their likely plan of attack would be. Russian local intelligence, never particularly impressive in Manchuria, was woeful when it came to understanding the strength and dispositions of the Japanese; there was little love lost between the indigenous population and the Russians resulting in scant sources of useful 'human' intelligence, and the generally poor state of the Russian cavalry regiments (including the Cossacks) meant that their scouting and screening duties rarely struck gold.

As it happened, Kuropatkin overestimated the strength of the Japanese armies that opposed him. Field Marshal Ōyama Iwao, Commander-in-Chief of Japanese land forces in Manchuria, had three armies at his disposal – Kuroki's First coming from the east through the mountains, Oku's Second and General Nozu Michitsura's Fourth both moving up from the south: the combined strength of all three Japanese armies amounting to 125,000 men (of whom 110,000 were infantry) and 170 guns (Warner & Warner 1975: 354). Kuropatkin's fear that he was actually outnumbered likely hindered clear

under Lieutenant-General Georgii Stackelberg were trounced by General Oku's Second Army, losing the best part of 5,000 men with a more decisive defeat only avoided thanks to the intervention of a torrential rainstorm. A few short weeks later General Count Fyodor Keller, one of the more notably competent and popular Russian officers and who had been appointed the new commander of the Eastern Detachment after the dismal Zasluch's removal, was tasked with holding the Motien Pass. The pass was a vital choke-

thinking, and may have encouraged him to adopt a more passive strategy, though it was obviously sensible for him to take a defensive posture considering the strength of Liaoyang's defences. The Japanese themselves were unsure as to Kuropatkin's thinking, expecting him to have decamped rather than offer battle. Major-General Fujii Shigeta, Kuroki's chief of staff, observed that

his delay at Liaoyang seems altogether too dangerous. Indeed, some of us think he is already too late to get away if only the Second Army keep a close eye upon him. He has a great reputation, and I really cannot understand him at present. The moment of his decision against holding the Motienling should also have been the moment of his issuing orders for the retreat on Mukden. (Quoted in Hamilton 1905: 250)

Whatever the reason for Kuropatkin's behaviour, Ōyama had to engage the Russians if he was to keep Port Arthur safely bottled up, even though he well knew that his own forces did not match those that opposed him.

The August days were thick with heat and the churning monsoon rains left mud everywhere, a situation made considerably worse by the tramping of tens of thousands of booted feet as the Russians organized themselves to receive Ōyama's attack. Lieutenant-General Nikolai P. Zarubaiev commanded the southern wing which was centred on Anshanchan, its job being to thwart the advance of Oku's Second Army and Nozu's Fourth Army; General Alexandr von Bilderling commanded the western wing, located between the Tang and Taitzu rivers; and the reserve, centred on Liaoyang and along the lines of communication back to Mukden, was commanded by Kuropatkin himself.

Ōyama pushed ahead, despite the rains and the fact that the two axes of his armies were still 40km distant from one another, relying on his own initiative and his enemy's vacillation to make the difference in the coming fight. It was unwise to wait, when every day brought yet more trainloads of Russian reinforcements from the west, reinforcements that were not available to Ōyama while Nogi was tied down trying to crack Port Arthur. The Russian position was strong, and though the Japanese had developed excellent intelligence on the defences of Liaoyang, such knowledge did not offer an easy route to victory. The nature of the defences as well as the peculiarities of the local terrain coupled with the fact that Ōyama's force was smaller than Kuropatkin's mitigated against any attempt at wide outflanking manoeuvres. The safest approach would be a series of combined frontal assaults on both the southern and eastern wings of the Russian force, ideally undertaken simultaneously by all three Japanese armies. It was an approach that was riven with uncertainty in all areas except one – it would be costly for all concerned.

Siberian skirmishers move through Liaoyang, arriving to reinforce Kuropatkin's army. Note the rolled packs and *papaha* sheepskin hats (the locally made versions being known as the *Manchzhurka*) as well as the entrenching tools visible on several of the soldiers. The tools alone demonstrate the skirmishers' recent arrival, as most Russian soldiers threw their spades away fairly quickly, seeing them as a needless encumbrance – one Russian officer at Mukden noted that most of his regiment could muster only between three and ten spades per company. (Culture Club/Getty Images)



The attack on Cairn Hill, 26 August–1 September 1904

MAP KEY

1 26–29 August: An initial series of attacks by Kuroki's First Army discomfits the Russian 10th Army Corps, leading Kuropatkin to order a precipitate withdrawal of his entire force from the outer defensive line over the night of 26/27 August, the retreat covered by heavy rain and mist. Ōyama's three armies are temporarily wrongfooted by Kuropatkin's withdrawal, but soon begin their advance towards the inner defensive line, digging in opposite the much stronger Russian inner positions on 29 August.

2 0500hrs, 30 August: Oku's Second Army launches its attack on the positions of the 1st Siberian Army Corps that screen the approaches to Cairn Hill. An artillery barrage covers the deployment of the Japanese infantry who advance, making contact with the Russian positions at 1130hrs. The battle continues throughout the day, but proves to be inconclusive.

3 0400hrs, 31 August: The second day of Japanese attacks commences, following much the same pattern as those of the previous day. Despite repeated infantry and artillery assaults

from the divisions of the Second and Fourth armies, the Russian positions hold out. Fighting dies away around 2000hrs that evening.

4 0400hrs, 31 August: Misinterpreting movements on the railway to the north of Liaoyang as the beginnings of a retreat, Kuroki orders a significant portion of his army to cross the Taitzu River on the night of 30/31 August in an attempt to outflank the Russian left and cut Kuropatkin's lines of communication. A collection of slightly less than half of Kuroki's force, led by the 12th Infantry Division, begins crossing the river at 0400hrs.

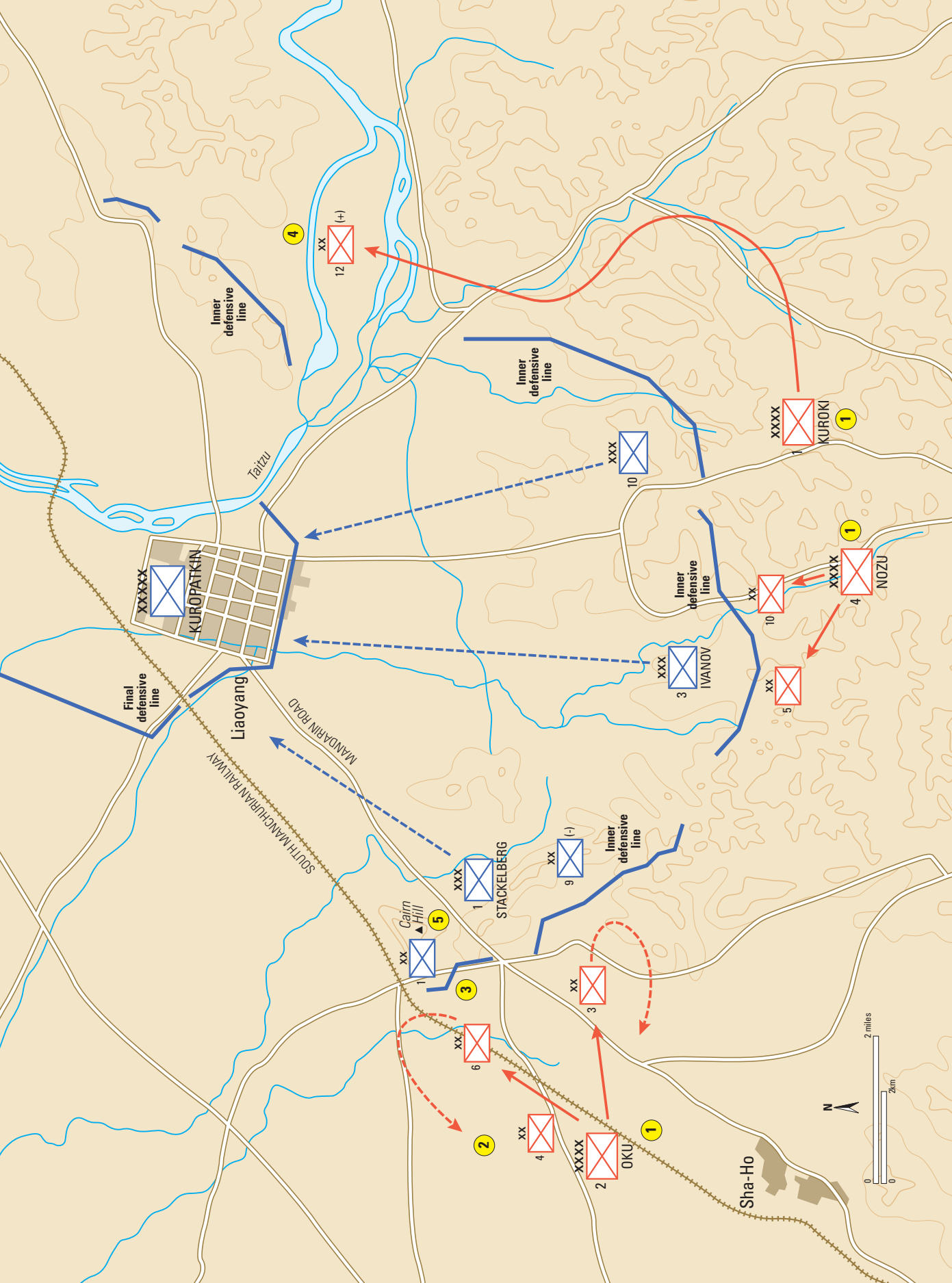
5 1 September: The manoeuvring of Kuroki's First Army on the extreme Russian left triggers the abandonment of the southern defensive positions on and around Cairn Hill during the night of 31 August/1 September. Upon discovering the retreat of the East Siberian regiments, the Japanese immediately occupy Cairn Hill.

Battlefield environment

Sitting in the Liao plain and flanked to the south and east by folded ranges of mountains, Liaoyang was a significant Manchurian city, second only to Mukden in importance and size. Wreathed by brick walls that were 12m tall and 6m thick, Liaoyang's northern edge was bordered by the Taitzu River, around 90m wide and almost unfordable during the rainy season. The Manchurian spur of the Trans-Siberian Railway started at Harbin and travelled south through Mukden and just to the west of Liaoyang (the square by the station being the location of Kuropatkin's quarters), and from there onwards to Port Arthur. To the north-east lay the Yentai coal mines, while 7km to the south-west of Liaoyang, on the eastern side of the railway line, stood the 211m-tall Cairn Hill, a major defensive feature that dominated the surrounding area and anchored the right wing of the inner defensive line. The outer defensive line was established around 24km to the south and east of the city and ran from Anshanchan in an easterly line to Langtzuchan where it then turned north, ending at Anping. Much time had been spent on the planning and construction of the final and inner lines, diligence that did not extend to stretches of the work undertaken on the outer defensive line, some of which was only started a few weeks before the arrival of the Japanese, and which was generally abandoned on 26 August (Warner & Warner 1975: 362). Between the lines large areas were covered by *kaoliang* (the local variety of millet), much of it grown to a height of 3m, tall enough to make navigation difficult and troops easy to conceal.



One of the redoubts that were constructed to defend the city of Liaoyang, its revetments reinforced with wooden stakes. Russian field fortifications were often hurried affairs, with some being markedly more effective than others – both extremes could be found in the defensive works around Liaoyang. The inner lines were 11km from Liaoyang and enveloped the southern and eastern approaches to the city in a rough semicircle. A final line of works surrounded the city, both ends anchored on the banks of the Taitzu River; it was studded with eight strongpoints, the spaces between them strewn with minefields and swathes of barbed wire, all covered by artillery and machine guns with interlocking fields of fire. (Réginald Kann/Wikimedia/Public Domain)



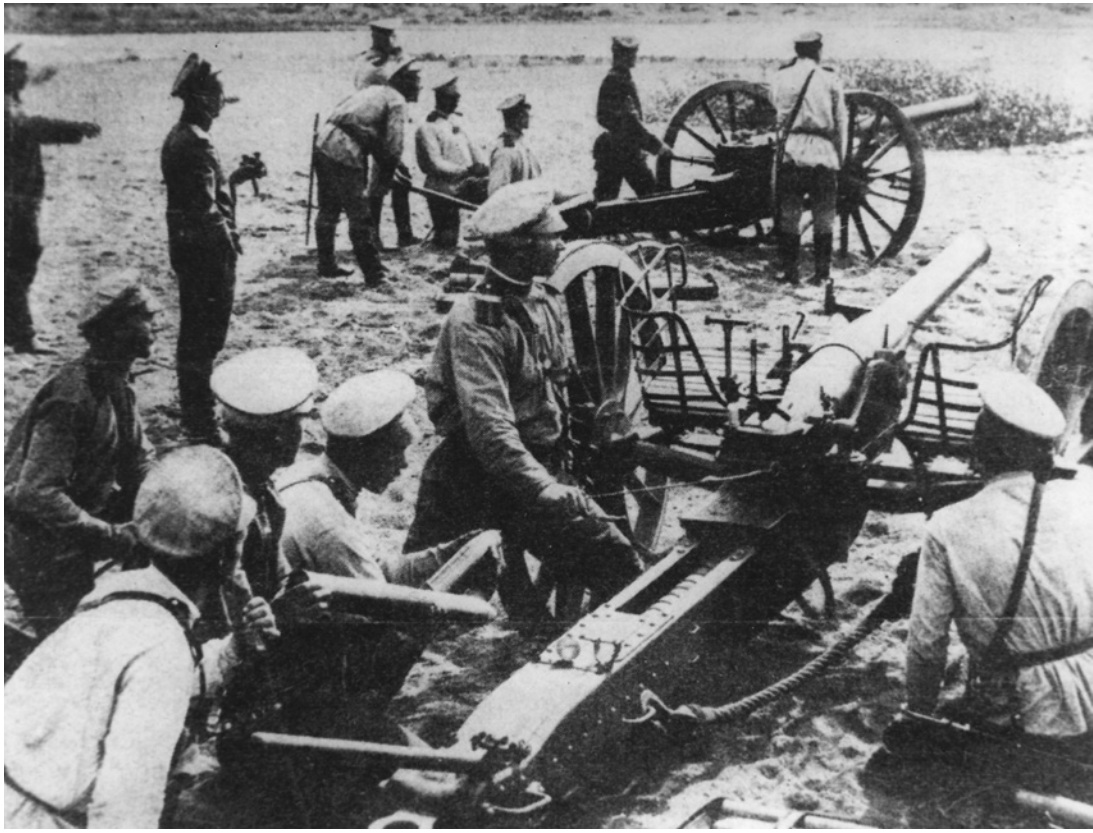
INTO COMBAT

Ōyama's initial blow fell on 26 August with an attack by elements of Kuroki's First Army through passes out of the mountains that led to the banks of the Tang River that were guarded by units from the 3rd Siberian Army Corps and the 10th Army Corps. The plan called for the First Army to approach from the east while Oku's Second Army moved up from the south, the overall aim being to pin Kuropatkin in Liaoyang and hook north to cut his lines of communication to Mukden. The Japanese hammered away at various parts of the Russian centre, and though the Tsar's men fought well, throwing off many of the Japanese advances, the defensively minded Kuropatkin refused to send up reinforcements to the areas under greatest stress, instead ordering the withdrawal of all his forces back to Liaoyang's inner defensive line. Only a few days beforehand he had seemed determined to mount a resilient defence of the outer works, but the Japanese assault had changed his mind; all Russian troops summarily debouched from the 24km-long outer defensive line during the night of 26/27 August, silently falling back under cover of heavy rain and accompanying mist towards Liaoyang. The Japanese troops preparing to attack Anshanchan were surprised to find the defences abandoned and their quarry gone, Oku only finding out at 0800hrs that his expected battle had vanished into the mist.

The divisions of the three Japanese armies spent the next few days cautiously advancing through the deserted fortifications and the mudbound lands beyond them, entrenching opposite the formidable line of works that ran like a chain around the southern half of Liaoyang, both ends of which were anchored to the banks of the Taitzu River. By 30 August Oku's Second Army, sited on the far left of the Japanese line, was in position opposite the Russian defences that screened Cairn Hill. Known as Shoushan to the Japanese, the 211m-tall heights were also called Hill 693, the name of 'Cairn Hill' coming about due to the stone ruins of a Chinese tower that could be found on its crest. The site was the dominant geographical feature on the southern approaches to Liaoyang, giving excellent views of the surrounding countryside for kilometres around. The Liaoyang–Port Arthur railway line and the Mandarin road ran a little way to the hill's west, its prominence ensuring that it was the linchpin of the southern approach to Liaoyang; if the Japanese could take it, they would overlook all the south-facing works of the final defensive line, the Liaoyang railway station and the city itself – all of which would be within range of Oku's guns. The British war correspondent Bennet Burleigh, travelling with the Japanese, described Cairn Hill as a

mass of granitic rock [that] somewhat resembled a man's knobby clenched fist ... In front of Soushan [*sic*] rise various detached masses, some bare rock, others verdure clad. Upon all of these the Russians had constructed forts, dug rows of trenches and pitfalls, and placed wire entanglements ... Covering the approaches at the base of the positions, and away beyond these, even on the plain, were trenches, emplacements for batteries, and rifle-pits. (Burleigh 1905: 297–98)

Another observer noted that a 1,400m swathe of *kaoliang* had been cut down in front of the approaches to Cairn Hill, allowing for clear fields of fire.



The two divisions of Lieutenant-General Baron von Stackelberg's 1st Siberian Army Corps occupied Cairn Hill and the surrounding landscape, with General Nikolai J. Ivanov's 3rd Siberian Army Corps to their left. Stackelberg's corps was made up of Lieutenant-General Gerngross's 1st East Siberian Rifle Division (1st–4th ESRRs), Major-General Kondratovich's 9th East Siberian Rifle Division (33rd–36th ESRRs), the Ussuri Cavalry Brigade, 64 field guns, 12 horse-artillery guns and eight Maxim machine guns. It was deployed with the 1st ESRR stationed on the far right with the succeeding regiments deployed in sequence as the line moved left, theoretically joining up with Ivanov's corps, though there was an uncomfortable gap between the two formations. The Russian trenches were in three tiers on Cairn Hill, while those on outlying positions were well-dug and set on the forward slopes of high ground. Kondratovich was happy enough with his position, though his division was understrength and the amount of ground it had to cover would leave it badly overstretched.

Opposing Stackelberg's 1st Siberian Army Corps was Oku's Second Army (3rd, 4th and 6th divisions), with Nozu's Fourth Army (5th and 10th divisions) deployed opposite Ivanov's 3rd Siberian Army Corps; the Japanese artillery was somewhat weaker than normal as many batteries were still making their way through the quagmire of roads from Anshanchan. Soon after dawn broke on the morning of 30 August, Oku's regiments began to move into position for their attack, the 6th Division on the right, the 3rd Division on the left, with the 4th Division in reserve. The supporting batteries of Japanese

A Russian battery of 76.2mm M1900 guns probably on the Liao plain, 1904. The M1900 was a reasonable weapon that could fire a 6.4kg shell out to a maximum of around 7,000–8,000m, making it more than a match for the Japanese 7.5cm Type 31 field gun, though the M1900's unusual recoil system and the lack of a gun shield proved to be disadvantages. With the M1900 already being replaced in Russian service by the 76.2mm Putilov M1902 quick-firing field gun at the beginning of the war, only nine of the East Siberian detachment's 32 batteries were still using the older gun, and by the war's end they had all been re-equipped with the newer artillery piece. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)



A Japanese battery firing shells in support of their infantry at Liaoyang, 1904. The guns are captured Russian pieces taken at Nanshan, and are 42-line (107mm) M1877 fortress and siege guns (not to be confused with the similarly named but quite different 87mm M1877 light field gun). The 42-line M1877 siege gun could fire a 15.6kg high-explosive or shrapnel shell out to a maximum range of 9.6km. (Library of Congress)

artillery fired at targets all along the line of defence, rather than concentrating their aim on a specific location or engaging in counter-battery work, and as a result the Russian guns were mostly unmolested by the time that the Japanese infantry advance commenced at 1130hrs.

The Japanese found their initial advance towards the Russian positions hampered by dense fields of *kaoliang* that could prove to be a mixed blessing. *Kaoliang* fields, their crops often over 3m in height, could provide excellent concealment for advancing infantry, Bennet Burleigh observing that 'A man riding on horseback became lost to sight the moment he rode amid the lofty, tassel-tufted sorghum or millet. Here was screen for infantry, cavalry and guns' (Burleigh 1905: 298). The density and height of *kaoliang* also made it difficult to navigate through, however, more than one unit getting lost among the close-packed ranks of tall stalks. *Kaoliang* could also be turned to the benefit of the defenders: the Russian habit was to bend the stems at a height



Russian riflemen photographed by Leon Bouet, 1904. The long range of modern rifles was primarily of use in volley fire, often against positions where the enemy could not even be seen with the naked eye. Captain Soloviev of the 34th ESRR described how his company engaged a distant Japanese battery hidden behind the crest of a hill: 'Fire was opened by volleys in squads at a distance of 2,700 paces [1,920m]. We could clearly see through the field glasses how dust was raised after each volley along the crest. It was evident that the men aimed well. But what proved the effectiveness of our fire still more was the fact that the Japanese battery suffered our fire for some half hour and then suddenly showered shrapnel and finally shell upon us' (Soloviev 1906: 16). Soloviev reflected on the failure of the Japanese to take Cairn Hill, as well as the cost of such resistance to his regiment: 'The Japanese did not force us to abandon a single position at Liaoyang by fire. And the fire was indeed fierce. After silencing our artillery, the Japanese could operate under most favorable conditions and literally covered us with projectiles. Our regiment lost 18 officers and about 700 men [with 1,000 more wounded]. But notwithstanding two days of this sweeping rain of bullets, the Japanese could not dislodge us from a single one of our trenches. If we left Liaoyang in the end, it was not the Japanese fire that made us do it' (Soloviev 1906: 24). Many other Russian field officers must have felt similarly, the lives of their men having been sacrificed in vain. (DEA / BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA / Getty Images)

of about 1m, directing the head of the plant in the expected direction of the attacker and weaving the strands together. When whole fields were treated in this manner they became very difficult for cavalry and infantry to pass through, often requiring hatchet-wielding pioneers to hack pathways through the obstruction before the main body could pass.

As one of the first Japanese elements from the 6th Division emerged from the thickets of *kaoliang* and approached a trench at the far right of the Russian line, the Indian Army military observer Colonel W.H.W. Waters took in the sight from his position atop Cairn Hill:

The Russians in the trench waited until the Japanese, who were not being subjected then to artillery fire, were within about 500 yards [460m], and well in the open on a bare, uncultivated stretch of ground, and then fired a volley. About thirty or forty Japanese fell in a bunch, but the remainder, who did not appear to be more than two companies strong in the firing line, continued their advance in an extended order, about five or six paces between each man. (Waters 1908: 91)

Another Russian volley stopped the advance, but instead of retreating the Japanese moved to the left, entering a stretch of *kaoliang* fields and using the concealment to manoeuvre around to the right flank of the trench. Unfortunately for the Japanese, the ground there had been cleared for 300m, and despite repeated efforts the Japanese infantry could not get across the bare ground without taking prohibitive casualties.

Other Japanese regiments were pressing in all along the Russian line, with varying degrees of success, the 3rd Division seeing some patches of limited progress, but they were still well short of being able to make an attack on the slopes of Cairn Hill. To the Russian left, Captain Soloviev's company of the 34th ESRR were facing attacks by units of the Fourth Army, during which they experienced at first hand repeated assaults by waves of Japanese infantry:

The Japanese attacked our regiment at Liaoyang several times ... it is true that they suffered great losses from our fire, especially when they advanced in column





Struggle over the southern approaches to Cairn Hill, 30 August 1904



Russian view: A company from the 2nd East Siberian Rifle Regiment (a part of the 1st East Siberian Rifle Division of the 1st Siberian Army Corps) defends a small hill less than 1km ahead of Stackelberg's main position on Cairn Hill, a 211m-high stretch of ground that is the linchpin of Kuropatkin's southern defences around Liaoyang. The hill's trenches are an adjunct to the defensive inner line, manned by retreating units after the abandonment of the Russian outer line on 26 August. Oku's infantry have been closing in on the new Russian positions for the past two days, and now in the early morning of 30 August they are ready to commence their main attack. As the Japanese infantry emerge from the fields

of *kaoliang* they run into wire entanglements that disrupt their advance, allowing the defenders to pour rifle fire into them. The centre of the Russian trench line has been adapted to allow the siting of a precious Maxim machine gun, and the weapon is firing ceaselessly; piles of brass cartridge cases and used fabric ammunition belts litter the ground all around the gun's position, while the weapon's brass water jacket steams in the warm air. An infantry officer stands close by the gun with his drawn sword held by his side, peering over the edge of the trench parapet and observing the terrible damage the weapon is inflicting on his enemies as they attempt to struggle up the slope below.



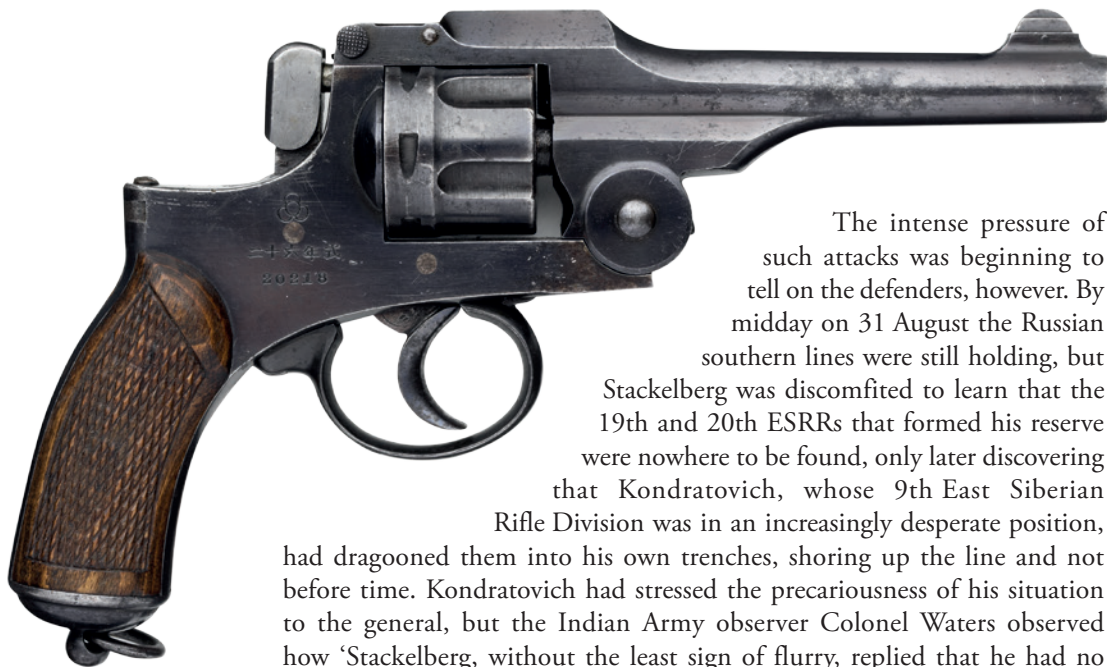
Japanese view: The three battalions of the 34th Infantry Regiment (17th Brigade, 3rd Division in Oku's Second Army) advance against a small, well-defended hill that sits less than 800m from the heart of the Russian position on Cairn Hill. Despite the early hour the air is already thick and muggy, the ground waterlogged from days of heavy rain. The first two battalions are advancing in line next to each other, with the third battalion echeloned behind to the right. One of the leading battalion's companies has been moving through the tall fields of *kaoliang*, an environment that is difficult to navigate but which at least offers a modicum of concealment. As the crops thin out, however, they give

way to bare ground that is thick with wire entanglements, ensuring that the last 150m to the Russian trenches will be by far the most difficult. The obstacles slow the movement of the Japanese infantry even more than the *kaoliang*, allowing the Russian riflemen on the hill, supported by artillery and the repetitive chatter of a Maxim machine gun, to take a horrible toll on the attackers. Several of the soldiers pause so as to be able to fire back, but there is precious little cover and most realize that they can only carry on or fall back. Despite the terrible casualties being inflicted on the company it is still forging ahead, encouraged onward by the captain, his sword drawn and his resolve undiminished.

formation. Their companies and battalions literally melted away, leaving whole heaps of dead behind. Several times, after having approached us to a distance of some 300 to 400 paces [210–285m], the Japanese turned back in disorder. But on the other hand, in that same battle they more than once went so far as to charge with the bayonet, and fierce hand-to-hand fights ensued. (Soloviev 1906: 24)

By 1600hrs the Japanese 6th Division had regrouped and made another attempt on the Russian right, but found the enemy position recently reinforced with both artillery and infantry. The Japanese battalions, struggling through wide expanses of open ground, were riddled by machine-gun fire from Russian emplacements, and despite the exhortations of their officers for the troops to rise up and press home the attack the men faltered, going to ground until reinforcements arrived at 1730hrs to provide them with some much-needed support. The stalling of the Second Army's attacks was made all the more serious by the situation to the right, where offensive action by the 3rd Siberian Army Corps had pushed Nozu's 10th Division back on its heels. Oku was ordered to press home another attack to relieve the pressure on Nozu by finally taking Cairn Hill. The British war correspondent Maurice Baring was attached to a Russian battery that was operating on a small knoll on the southern flank, giving him a perfect view of the Japanese attack: 'you could hear the firing, and the battle seemed to be going on underground. One seemed to be in a gigantic ant-heap where invisible ants were struggling and moving. In the evening the result became apparent in the stream of wounded and mangled men who were carried from the field to the ambulances' (Baring 1906: 125). Despite the best efforts of Oku's divisions the Japanese assault had run its course by 2015hrs, and though it might have provided some ancillary benefit to the labours of the neighbouring Fourth Army, it achieved little in its own terms.

The day's fighting had made it clear that a position whose front and flanks bristled with obstacles supported by dense hedges of rifles and well-sited artillery was practically impregnable during daylight, so the Japanese decided to try to launch a night attack against the positions of the 3rd ESRR to the east of Cairn Hill. The extreme darkness of the night, however, coupled with the general level of disorganization among the units of the 6th and 3rd divisions after the previous day's fighting, made such endeavours fruitless; the Japanese were not ready to attack again before 0400hrs on 31 August. The day began with exchanges of gunnery, the Japanese bringing more barrels to bear than the previous day, several of their batteries having completed their mud-spattered slog from Anshanchan during the night. The divisions of the Second and Fourth armies recommenced their attacks, in several cases the way led by sappers who cut paths through the wire entanglements, though with much the same results as the previous day. There was some limited success enjoyed by the men of the 2nd Division's 3rd Brigade, whose relentless attacks on a portion of Russian trenches led to their capture, though not without a fearsome fight that included each side hurling rocks at one another and grappling with fists and bayonets. Despite the best efforts of the Japanese they were unable to convert their capture of the trench into anything more substantial, their newly won position being subject to constant Russian counter-attacks and artillery bombardment.



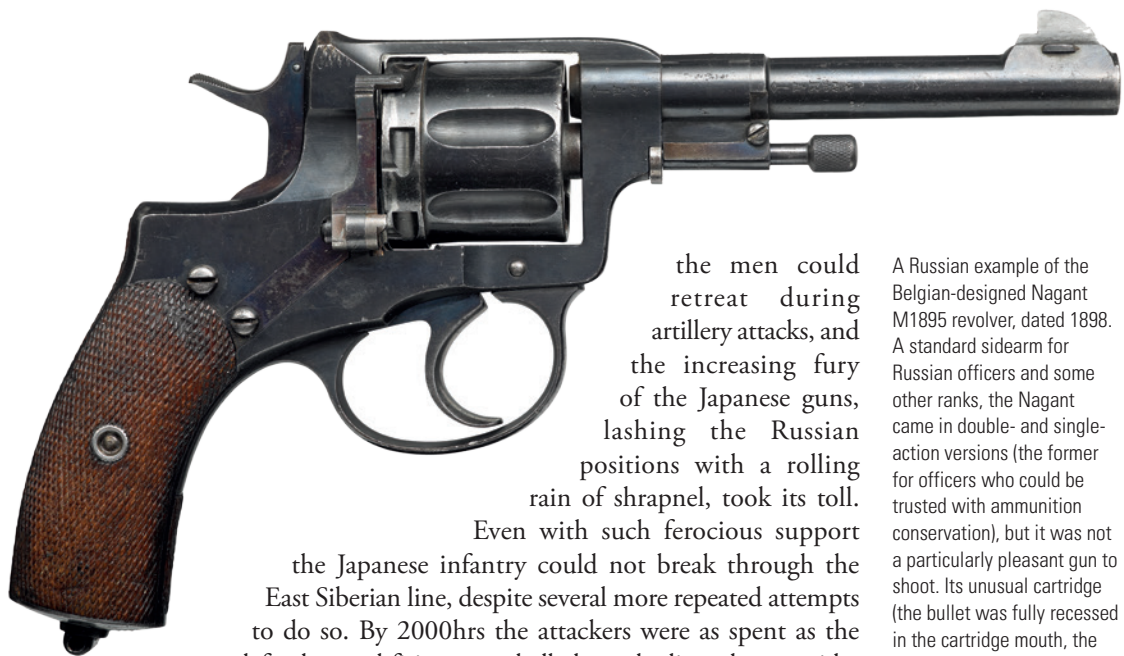
A Type 26 double-action-only revolver. The hammer is 'bobbed' – that is, lacking a cocking spur – meaning the gun can only be cocked and fired by pulling the trigger. The new pistol, the first domestically produced Japanese military sidearm, replaced the Smith & Wesson No. 3 and was a top-break design like its predecessor. It held six rounds of the relatively low-powered 9×22mmR ammunition, but the fact that it saw no significant redesign after the war's end (unlike the Type 30 'Arisaka' rifle) is an indication that it performed well enough. It saw service as an officer's sidearm where it was more likely a symbol of rank than a practical weapon in anything other than dire circumstances. Japanese officers had a great deal of latitude in their personal arms and equipment, and were responsible for purchasing their own sidearms, so many could be found carrying other pistols such as the older S&W No. 3, or privately purchased guns such as the 7.63mm Mauser C 96. (© Royal Armouries PR.3477)

The intense pressure of such attacks was beginning to tell on the defenders, however. By midday on 31 August the Russian southern lines were still holding, but Stackelberg was discomfited to learn that the 19th and 20th ESRRs that formed his reserve were nowhere to be found, only later discovering that Kondratovich, whose 9th East Siberian Rifle Division was in an increasingly desperate position,

had dragooned them into his own trenches, shoring up the line and not before time. Kondratovich had stressed the precariousness of his situation to the general, but the Indian Army observer Colonel Waters observed how 'Stackelberg, without the least sign of flurry, replied that he had no reinforcements to send, and that Kondratovitch and his men must die, if necessary, at their posts' (Waters 1908: 93).

Further Japanese attacks had pierced Kondratovich's trenches, capturing several of them for a brief period before the invaders were ejected at bayonet-point. Captain Soloviev, whose company of the 34th ESRR was in the thick of the fighting, remembered how 'At both Liaoyang and Mukden the Japanese charged with the bayonet and received bayonet charges with counter-attack. The result was that the Japanese having experienced the effect of the bayonet upon themselves changed their opinion on this subject and learned from us how to use it, while we are still squabbling over its importance' (Soloviev 1906: 25). Despite the advances in weaponry and tactics, for many Russian officers the outcome of any combat was still determined by the side that could make best use of the bayonet, with combats like those experienced around Cairn Hill often touted as evidence for the defence. That the bayonet still had a role cannot be denied, though it was not blades but bullets and shells that were shaping the day-to-day reality on the battlefield, as many Japanese battalions had recently discovered to their great cost.

The situation of the East Siberian regiments grew more precarious as the day progressed. They had little in the way of provisions, and the ammunition, especially that for the supporting guns, was beginning to run low. The men were exhausted after enduring near-cessless Japanese artillery bombardment and infantry attacks all along the line for the last day and a half, but they stuck to their trenches and fought on. By 1615hrs Russian engineers were busy building a west-facing shelter trench on the extreme right of the line to hedge against any collapse in that much-battered sector, though a late-afternoon lull seemed to promise some small reprieve from the near-constant fighting that had characterized much of the day. Such relief proved to be all too short-lived, however, with the Japanese pressing hard once again from 1700hrs; the Russian trenches were generally well built, but they lacked splinter-proof shelters under which



the men could retreat during artillery attacks, and the increasing fury of the Japanese guns, lashing the Russian positions with a rolling rain of shrapnel, took its toll.

Even with such ferocious support the Japanese infantry could not break through the East Siberian line, despite several more repeated attempts to do so. By 2000hrs the attackers were as spent as the defenders and firing ceased all along the line, the two sides in more or less the same positions that they had occupied on the dawn of the previous day.

In the end the key to taking Cairn Hill was found on the extreme right Japanese flank with Kuroki's First Army. Positioned to the east of Liaoyang, on 30 August some of Kuroki's men saw activity on the railway and around the city that led them to believe – erroneously, as it happened – that the Russians were preparing to evacuate their position and fall back on Mukden. Kuroki immediately ordered half his force to prepare for a crossing of the Taitzu River that very night, his intention being to cut the Russian line of communication, turning the enemy's left in the process. Such a move was exactly what Kuropatkin most feared, so much so that on the very morning of 31 August he had drafted an order, Disposition Number 3, that called for the redeployment of all Russian forces to meet such a threat; part of that redeployment called for the abandonment of the southern defensive works around and including Cairn Hill. The much-mauled East Siberian regiments withdrew that same night, abandoning the ground on which so many of their number had died. Oku's and Nozu's divisions moved forward with the daylight, occupying the fortifications and Cairn Hill on 1 September. They immediately began the work of hauling their artillery pieces up the hill, installing them in the freshly vacated Russian gun pits and opening fire on the railway station and town that lay exposed before them.

By the evening of 3 September it was clear to Kuropatkin that his position was untenable. Cairn Hill was in Japanese hands, portions of the final defensive line were running low on ammunition, and Kuroki's advance on the Russian left still threatened to destabilize the whole position if it got any closer to Kuropatkin's lines of communication. The order for a general withdrawal was issued at 0600hrs the following morning, the vast Russian forces extricating themselves from contact with the exhausted Japanese and retreating north to Mukden.

A Russian example of the Belgian-designed Nagant M1895 revolver, dated 1898. A standard sidearm for Russian officers and some other ranks, the Nagant came in double- and single-action versions (the former for officers who could be trusted with ammunition conservation), but it was not a particularly pleasant gun to shoot. Its unusual cartridge (the bullet was fully recessed in the cartridge mouth, the chamber canting forward allowing the cartridge case to form a gas seal with the barrel upon firing, supposedly increasing velocity but also making the used cartridges more difficult to extract), coupled with a loading gate that only allowed rounds to be ejected or loaded one at a time, resulted in a weapon that was exceedingly slow to reload in comparison to other contemporary sidearms. (© Royal Armouries PR.7967)

203 Metre Hill

7 August–5 December 1904

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

Port Arthur – the strategically important harbour that lay at the bottom of the Liaotung (Liaodong) Peninsula and which had been blockaded since the first day of the war – was a problem for the Japanese. It provided a safe haven for a Russian fleet, and even though the Imperial Japanese Navy had more or less effectively bottled up a number of the Russian cruisers and battleships, they still posed a major threat to Japanese operations in the Yellow Sea. There were only two options to eliminate such a threat: conduct a naval attack on

A Japanese officer saluting his soldiers near Sha-Ho, October 1904. The losses sustained in the early battles of the war were higher than the Japanese had expected, and those suffered at Liaoyang and during the initial attempts on Port Arthur made the situation desperate. In September 1904 four new Imperial Japanese Army divisions were activated and the reserves drastically expanded by doubling the obligation of service to ten years and increasing the age limit from 32 to 37. The new divisions would not be ready for deployment until May 1905, so short-term losses were replaced by the mobilization of 65,000 reservists who quickly filled the existing gaps in the armies at Liaoyang and Port Arthur (Drea 2009: 107). (ullstein bild/ ullstein bild via Getty Images)





Russians advancing to take the place of fallen comrades in the outer forts during the siege of Port Arthur. Though Russian field fortifications were often rather slapdash, their prepared fortifications, including those around Port Arthur, were another matter. Despite being unfinished at the start of the war, the ring of forts, walls and trenches that surrounded the city were well-sited and made to withstand considerable damage, often using concrete to reinforce walls and strongpoints, as well as beams of timber and steel in the construction of deep earth-covered bunkers. Artillery pieces were carefully sited in purpose-built emplacements, while machine guns were positioned to allow for mutually supporting zones of fire. The defenders could well enough endure the relatively light Japanese gunnery during the first months of the siege, but the arrival of huge 28cm howitzer L/10s led to increasing casualties, the gradual elimination of Russian gun positions, and the reduction of several key strongpoints. (Library of Congress)

the Russian ships at their anchorages in the harbour – an action fraught with danger and not likely to succeed when the city's shore batteries were taken into account – or approach the problem from the landward side.

For General Nogi Maresuke, recalled to active service to command the Japanese Third Army in his country's new war with the Russian Empire, the task of taking Port Arthur must have seemed fateful. Nogi was 55 years old and had a wealth of campaigning experience from the Meiji Dynasty's Restoration Wars and the Satsuma Rebellion, though it was his capture of Port Arthur during the First Sino-Japanese War that secured his reputation; in a few short weeks in November 1894 he had taken the approaches, outlying fortifications and the harbour itself, the prize of the whole campaign. Despite such success his development as an officer had been driven by practical experience on operations of a much more modest scale (the entire Japanese force in 1894 was only 15,000 strong, with Nogi commanding a single regiment at the time), and he had little in the way of formal staff training, a shortcoming demonstrated by his inability to read topographical maps or adapt to unexpected tactical realities. His devotion to the Emperor was absolute, and he took pains to ensure that the same sense of deep obligation and obedience was cultivated throughout his army.

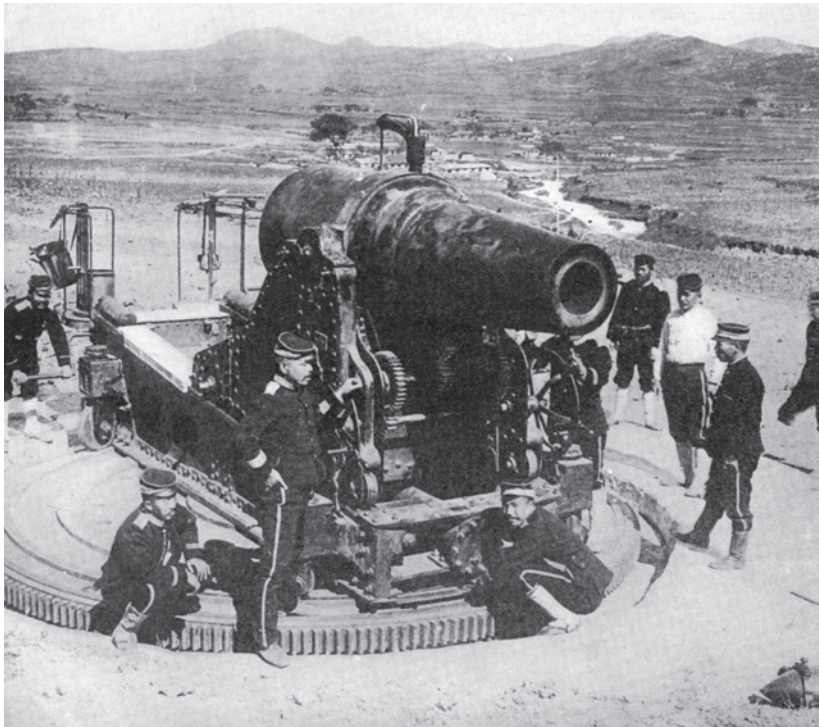
Nogi's Third Army had begun landing with General Oku Yasukata's Second Army in the vicinity of Dalny on 5 May 1904. By the end of July his force consisted of the 1st, 9th and 11th Infantry divisions, as well as seven battalions of siege artillery (72 15cm mortars, 24 8.8cm mortars, 16 15cm howitzers, four 10cm Krupp guns and 30 12cm bronze guns), a heavy-field-artillery regiment (28 12cm howitzers), a naval-artillery brigade (eight 12cm guns and 18 12-pdr guns) and 12 Russian guns captured at Nanshan. Oku's main effort was directed at severing the Liaotung Peninsula from its

A Russian officer poses next to a 9in (230mm) gun – likely drawn from the town's coastal defences – with a shell ready to load at Wolf Battery during the siege of Port Arthur, 1904. Russian artillery emplacements were well-fortified and were usually safe from the smaller-calibre artillery the Japanese were using, a situation that changed with the arrival of 28cm siege howitzers at the beginning of October. The explosion of the 217kg shells fired by these Japanese weapons could be devastating, but even those that failed to detonate (a not uncommon occurrence) caused massive damage to any Russian defences they hit simply due to their great mass and velocity. (Library of Congress)



Manchurian hinterland, ensuring that no Russian help could come to the aid of Port Arthur from the north, while on 24 June Nogi received his orders to take his Third Army southwards and invest the fortress, capturing it as soon as he could.

The defence of Port Arthur was in the hands of Lieutenant-General Anatoli M. Stössel, another example of a Russian senior commander who seemed to only follow the orders of his superiors when he agreed with them – arrogance that proved to be entirely unjustified when viewed in the light of his meagre military achievements during the siege. Of his two subordinates, Lieutenant-General Roman I. Kondratenko, commander of the 7th East Siberian Rifle Division (25th–28th ESRRs) proved to be a highly competent officer whose energy and intelligence would have a measurable impact on the defenders; Major-General Alexander V. Fock, commander of the 4th East Siberian Rifle Division (13th–16th ESRRs) that was also stationed at Port Arthur, was somewhat less impressive. The grand total of all the forces assigned to the defence of the city was 47,000 men, 30,000 of whom were infantry. Aside from Kondratenko's and Fock's men the garrison made use of the fleet's sailors, most of whom had little else to do and 4,000 of whom were organized into ten infantry companies. In addition there was the 5th ESRR commanded by Colonel Nikolai A. Tretyakov, three East Siberian depot battalions, two companies of Frontier Guards, a telegraph company, and 2,500 members of the Town Guard, a civilian militia drawn from the population of Port Arthur. The fortifications could muster a total of 518 guns: 143 of them were naval pieces removed from the warships bottled up in the harbour and pressed into service along the lines, and a further 118 were primarily for coastal defence (though some of them could swivel for use against land-based targets).



A Japanese 28cm howitzer L/10 near Port Arthur, October 1904. Originally designed by the British Armstrong company in 1884, these mighty siege howitzers were locally produced by the Osaka Artillery Arsenal and intended for coastal defence, but the dearth of heavy siege guns at Port Arthur necessitated their being pressed into use there; initially going into action in early October, by the following month they were raining 350 shells a day on Port Arthur and its defences. Firing a 28cm shell weighing 217kg out to a range of 7,800m, the siege howitzers were instrumental in battering through the Russian outer defensive line and, after the fall of 203 Metre Hill, the systematic destruction of the remaining Russian ships at anchor in the harbour below. (Universal History Archive/ Getty Images)

By the dying days of July 1904 the Third Army's advance had thrown the Russians back on their last line of temporary defences, quickly capturing Fenghuangcheng (Wolf Hills) and causing the evacuation of most of the rest of the forward positions apart from Big Orphan Hill (Takushan) and Little Orphan Hill (Hsiaokushan) which anchored the right of the Russian line. Strung out in an enveloping semicircle from Louisa Bay to the Yellow Sea, Nogi's Third Army numbered more than 60,000 men and 474 guns, though the majority of these were lighter field pieces. The Russian right seemed to offer the best, most direct place to start reducing the city's outer defences, so Nogi determined that the first task would be the capture of Big Orphan Hill and Little Orphan Hill.

Unfortunately for the Japanese, the defences around Port Arthur had undergone radical improvements since the quick capture of the city ten years earlier, and though the works were still incomplete at the start of the war, they were much more formidable than anything Nogi had encountered in his previous venture. Looking at a map of the works, Nogi misunderstood the meaning of contour lines and markers of elevation, giving him no accurate idea of the terrain through which his men would actually have to fight. He assumed that the shortest route to Port Arthur shown on the map would be the quickest line of attack, when in fact it committed his forces to assaults through some of the most difficult and best-defended terrain of the Russian line (Drea 2009: 110–11). Furthermore, Nogi's direct observation of the Russian defences from his vantage point on the newly captured Wolf Hills gave him no particular cause for concern, even though it was all too clear that a significant amount of effort had been expended in the construction of new forts and obstacles. Easy assumptions would soon give way to hard realities.

Port Arthur and 203 Metre Hill, 7 August–5 December 1904

MAP KEY

1 7–9 August: General Nogi launches his offensive against Port Arthur by taking Big Orphan Hill and Little Orphan Hill, but at the cost of 1,280 Japanese casualties.

2 19–24 August: Nogi launches frontal assaults against the centre of the Russian defences as well as 174 Metre Hill on the Russian left. After several days, the Japanese capture 174 Metre Hill, but the attacks on the Russian centre are a bloody failure.

3 19–23 September: The first Japanese attacks are launched on 203 Metre Hill. Despite some small initial gains, the position proves too strong for the Japanese, who decide to approach the hill by driving saps towards the defending Russian trench line.

4 1900hrs, 27 November: Nogi launches his second major assault on 203 Metre Hill. Elements of the 15th Infantry Regiment attacking from the south-west briefly reach the Left Redoubt, but are pushed back and dig in; a similar attempt by the 1st Kobi (Reserve) Brigade against Peak 203 is also

repelled, both attacks defeated in part by enfilade fire from 180 Metre Hill (Akasaka Yama).

5 0800hrs, 30 November: The Japanese launch a further attack on the Left Redoubt, seizing it briefly before being ejected by the Russians with bayonets and hand grenades. Later that day three infantry regiments from the 7th Division (the 26th, 27th and 28th) launch an assault on the Right Redoubt, but are thrown back with extremely heavy casualties.

6 1–4 December: Realizing that the Russian defences have to be reduced before another major attempt, the Japanese press forward with new saps and concentrate fire from their 28cm howitzers on the heights, destroying the Right Redoubt and reducing much of the Russian position to ruins.

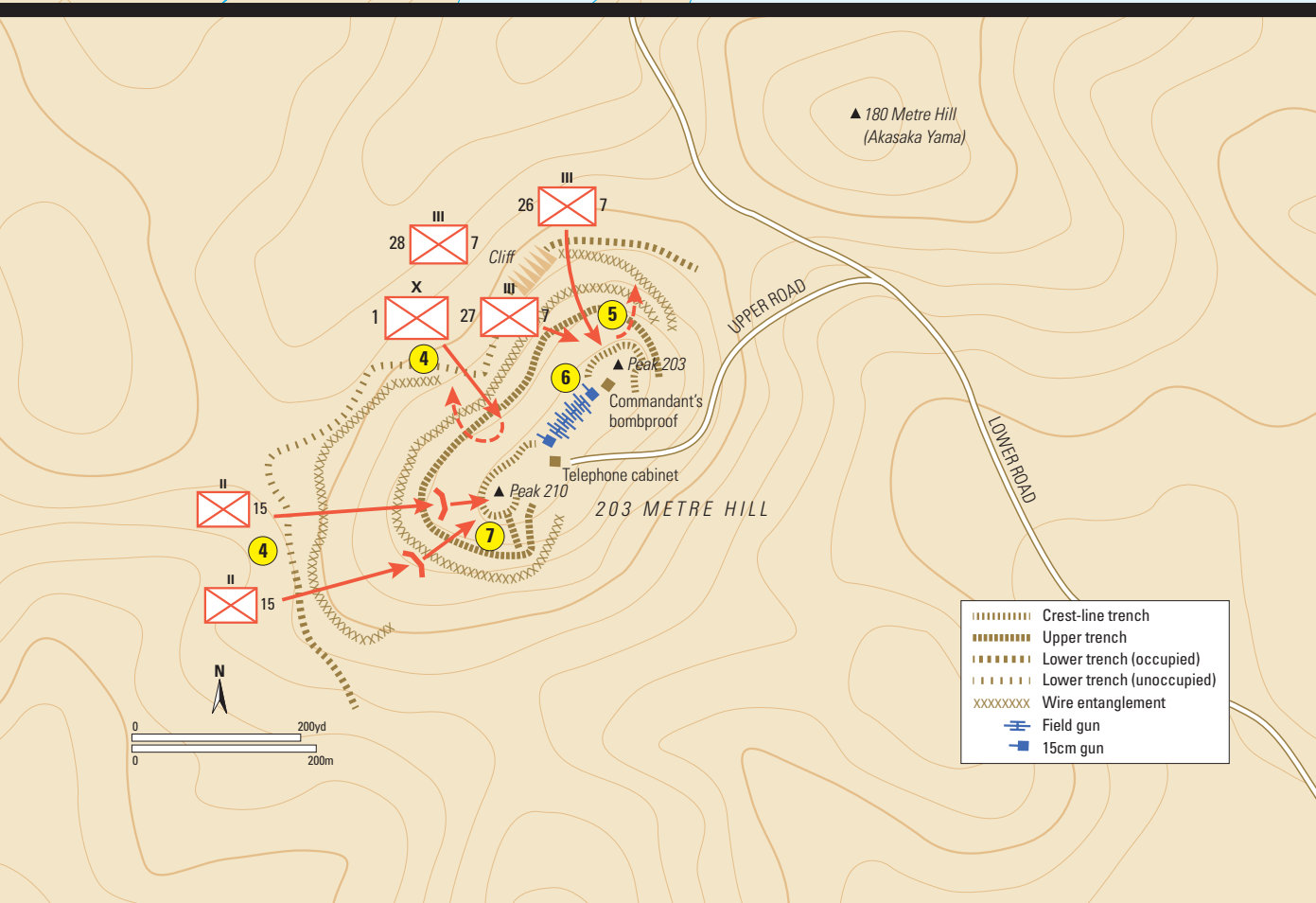
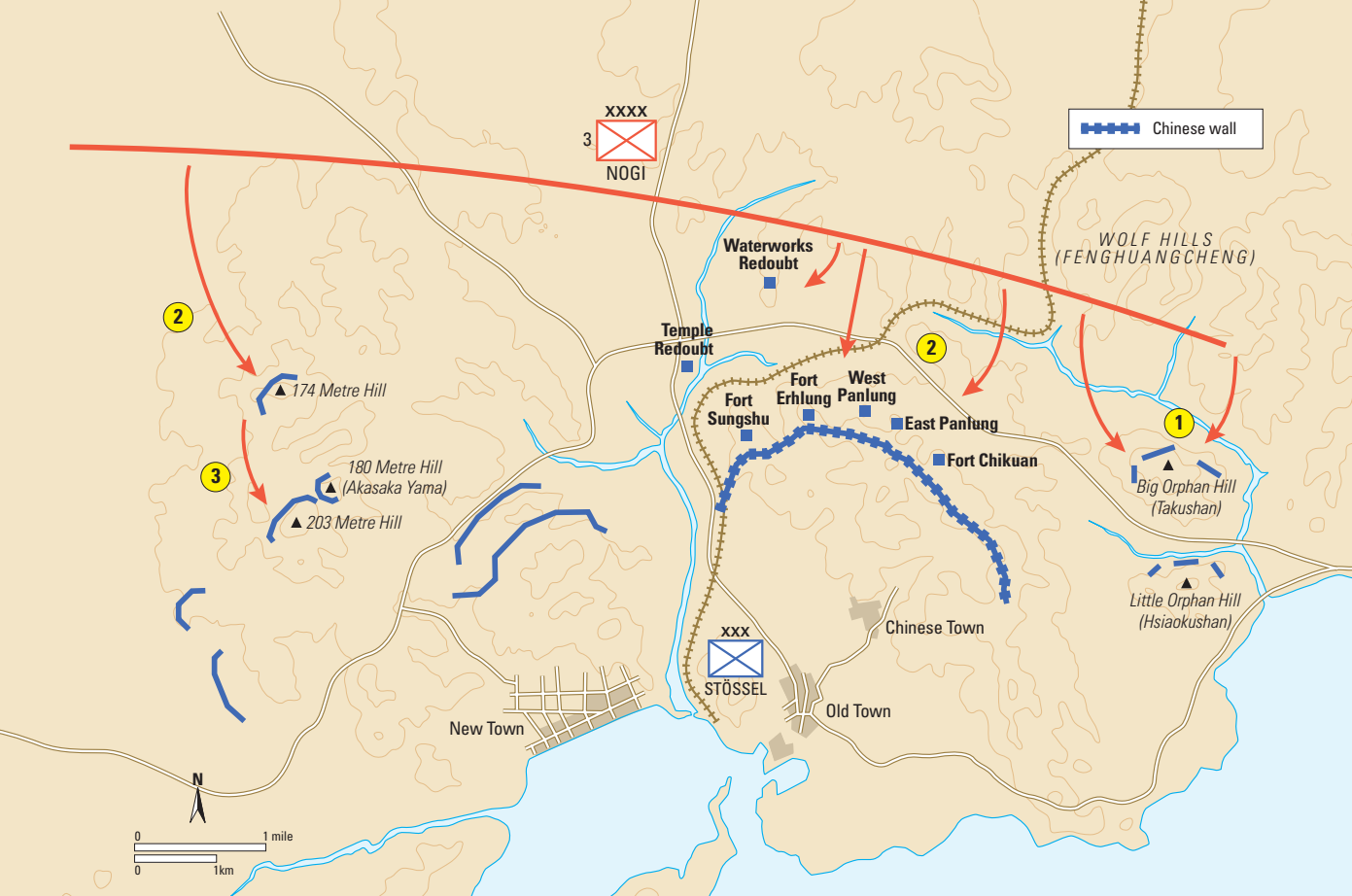
7 5 December: The Russians are overwhelmed by numerous attacks, with 203 Metre Hill falling into Japanese hands by 1700hrs. On the following morning the Japanese install an artillery observation post on the hill's crest, dooming the town and the Russian fleet in its harbour.

Battlefield environment

Port Arthur sat in a shallow bowl of ground surrounded by a ring of hills that enclosed the city (made up of the New Town to the west and the Old Town and Chinese Town to the east). The landward defences line consisted of three concentric layers: closest was a large ditch that encircled the approaches to the town; the old Chinese Wall, 3,600m further out from the ditch, was dotted with old forts as well as some new ones; and lastly there were a number of fortified hills to the north-east and north-west (the main ones from east to west: Little Orphan Hill, Big Orphan Hill, 174 Metre Hill, 180 Metre Hill and 203 Metre Hill). 203 Metre Hill was the key to the Russian defences as from its crest, unlike the other heights that surrounded the town, there was an unobstructed view of the harbour below and all the ships that sheltered there. These outer hills were covered with a loose chain of bunkers and redoubts (some newly built, others still unfinished) and batteries of artillery supplemented by 143 naval pieces taken from the Russian warships bottled up in the harbour, all connected by a network of freshly dug trenches, with tunnels, covered ways and concrete walls to facilitate safe movement between positions. The hill defences were further strengthened by the laying of minefields and wire entanglements (often just telegraph wire as the barbed variety was in short supply), electric fences, machine-gun positions with wide fields of fire, and spotlights to illuminate any night assaults.



203 Metre Hill on the day of its capture by the Japanese, 5 December 1904. In the foreground, Russian soldiers collect cartridges from the dead before burial. The crest of the hill was in fact made up of two peaks, a south-western one 210m high and a north-eastern one 203m high, the two of them connected by a narrow ridgeline 128m long. The hill itself was mostly rock, with only a sparse covering of topsoil that meant trenches had to be hacked out of stone. There were two redoubts, one on Peak 210 and one on Peak 203 that housed a command post, with a battery of guns ensconced on the crest line between them, while the main defence consisted of a strong trenchwork that encircled the hill at the 180m contour line, the sections facing the Japanese being well covered and reinforced with timber and 2cm-thick steel plate. A second trench line had been started 30m below the main trench, but was incomplete (Connaughton 2003: 242). (Photo12/UIG via Getty Images)



INTO COMBAT

Nogi opened his campaign against Big Orphan Hill and Little Orphan Hill on 7 August, an artillery bombardment presaging a massed infantry attack across a watercourse, rough ground and up steep slopes. Both hills fell, though at a cost of 1,280 Japanese casualties; Nogi was not dissuaded from his plan to mount a frontal assault. At dawn on 19 August, the 9th and 11th divisions attacked the Waterworks Redoubt and other forts in the centre while the 1st Division assaulted 174 Metre Hill on the Russian left. After a few days of fierce fighting 174 Metre Hill fell, but the Japanese assaults against the Russian centre devolved into a bloodbath that dragged on until 24 August, by which time the Russian positions remained mostly secure and the Japanese had accrued 18,000 casualties.

September brought a re-evaluation of Japanese tactics and objectives, with trench systems dug in order to provide the attackers with greater protection; 203 Metre Hill was now recognized as an object worthy of capture, though its full importance was not yet appreciated. On 18 September, General Kodama Gentarō, Chief of General Staff of the Manchurian Army, arrived. Kodama had been sent to help take the siege in hand; his guidance encouraged Nogi to see the strengths and potential weaknesses in the Russian position, and likely helped Nogi realize the value of the high ground that made up the Russian left.

203 Metre Hill had been ignored by the Russians almost as much as by the Japanese, but enough work had been undertaken to make its already formidable form even more forbidding: a battery of four field guns flanked by two 15cm guns was dug in to the crest between the redoubts, with Maxim machine guns, 37mm quick-firing guns and a torpedo launcher added to the hill's two trench lines; a garrison made up from the 1st Company of the 28th ESRR and a company of sailors was installed. The first serious attack on the hill was launched on 19 September: a Japanese reserve regiment made a bold thrust up the slopes, its advance covered by Hotchkiss machine guns. Initial Japanese progress was good, with the lower trench – currently

unoccupied – quickly taken, and the upper trench threatened with capture too, only reinforcements sent by Kondratenko saving the day for the Russians. That pattern, a mixed bag of defenders reinforced by different units, would continue right through until the hill's capture. Company-strength Russian units were usually worn down fairly quickly, their remnants mixing with the leftovers of other units, making the defenders a motley collection of Siberian riflemen, reservists, sailors and others. Colonel Nikolai A. Tretyakov of the 5th ESRR (promoted major-general on 22 October) was given charge of the defence, a role he would fulfil almost to the very end, being seriously wounded the day before the position fell.

In the front parallel of the Japanese trenches at Port Arthur. Japanese soldiers were more consistent than their Russian counterparts in digging trenches, and produced works of a generally higher quality. Note the mix of summer and winter uniforms on display in the image, particularly the soldier in the foreground who wears his 1904-pattern khaki tunic over the top of his blue jacket as a rudimentary form of camouflage. (Library of Congress)



On 20 September a more full-blooded Japanese effort was launched, attempting to storm 203 Metre Hill from three different directions at once, as witnessed by the British war correspondent Frederick Villiers:

The little men pour out from their cover to swell the ranks of those already half-way up the glacis. Those hiding below the first trench take cover no longer, but, with loud 'Banzais,' race up towards the fort. The crest is at once a blaze of flame, which runs along the edge like molten metal, and the two ominous muzzles, breaking the sky-line, point and vomit their shrapnel over the on-coming battalions. (Villiers 1905: 75)

The pair of 15cm guns that had been sited on the hill played havoc with the dense ranks of struggling Japanese infantrymen. Two of the attacks were thrown back, but the Japanese eventually secured a tenuous lodgement, capturing and occupying a Russian bombproof (a sort of casement). The infantry assaults continued for the succeeding two days, wave after wave of soldiers being cut down by rifles, machine guns and improvised mines. There was no cover to speak of on the slopes, so the Japanese started forming impromptu parapets out of their numerous dead, the Russians in turn rolling rocks down the sides of the hill in an effort to dislodge those grim firing positions.

By 1300hrs on 22 September the Japanese suffered a serious reverse when the Russians discovered the location of their reserves, shelling them into oblivion. That night a great effort was made to clear the remaining Japanese from the hill, especially the hardy band of defenders who had lodged themselves in the bombproof for the last three days. Major-General Mikhail I. Kostenko, one of the Russian defenders present on 203 Metre Hill that night, saw what happened:

our side began to throw large rocks, and Lieutenant Podgurski rolled his [homemade 8kg guncotton] mine on to them, which produced a tremendous effect. The explosion was so powerful that the trench immediately collapsed on them. Gigantic flames enveloped the men close to the trench, whose clothing instantly caught fire. They began to run away like madmen, jostling each other and thereby passing on the flames. Some ran down the hill, but forgot about the barbed wire there; they got entangled, dropped down one by one, forming human campfires. At the same time our riflemen, supported by newly-arrived reserves, opened up with a hellish, withering fire. Japanese regiments arrived to support those who had been attacked and were met by the same destructive rifle fire, and by guncotton cubes and mines. They strode, ran, crawled and scrambled up the slope, fell to the ground, and burned. Others moved up the hill like flaming torches ... by 0400 all the trenches had been cleared and the surviving clump of



A study of Kharitina E. Korotkievich manning the defences of a fort at Port Arthur, 3 October 1904. Following after her husband when he was called up to the Imperial Russian Army, she refused service as a nurse, instead asking to join her husband's unit, the 7th Company of the 13th East Siberian Rifle Regiment. Surprisingly accepted by the regiment's commander, she was armed and outfitted as a regular soldier, here wearing an M1881 uniform and holding an M1891 Mosin-Nagant rifle; she learned how to fire a rifle and took part in some skirmishes, but spent the majority of her time working as a messenger and helping to evacuate wounded soldiers from the line. Tasked with delivering a situation report to the regimental headquarters, she was killed by a Japanese shell as she was leaving her company dugout a few hours after this picture was taken. (Library of Congress)

Japanese had withdrawn ... their bodies literally lay in heaps on the slopes and the foot of 203 Metre Hill. (Kostenko 1906: 190–91)

That put paid to any immediate Japanese hopes of securing the hill, their efforts having cost them 2,500 casualties for no gain. The Russian positions were too strong to attack in the open, and the majority of supporting artillery was of too small a calibre to make much of a dent in the hill's robust and well-engineered defences. The arrival of 28cm howitzer L/10s from early October would solve that problem, while a carefully dug set of trenchworks would allow the Japanese infantry to get close enough to launch their attacks from covered positions, mitigating the terrible losses they would otherwise surely endure. November also saw much-needed replacements start to arrive from Japan, including the 7th Infantry Division and reserve infantry units (Kobi Brigades), some of which would soon be committed to the next phase of assaults on 203 Metre Hill and its environs. In early November Kodama returned once more, this time to redirect the siege against the high ground on the Russian left, relieving Nogi in the process if need be. Nogi, though technically still in charge, showed no pride in the face of Kodama's suggestions, following them to the letter.

Now understanding the value that possession of the hill would confer, Nogi determined that it had to be taken at all costs. Still aware of the high price that the attacks on the hill had exacted in September, he ordered that a more careful series of saps be dug towards the position's south-western edge, worming their way across the valley floor and up the lower slopes of 203 Metre Hill, eventually driving right through the barbed-wire entanglements that covered the approaches to the lower trench line. Digging such trenches proved extremely difficult because

on 203-Metre Hill ... the ground was solid rock, the approaches [that were] hastily thrown up during the actual fighting consisted of sandbag breastworks. There was no trench at all. The advanced saps, before they were widened, were sometimes four feet [1.2m] deep, and so narrow that two men could with difficulty pass each other ... The approach against 203-Metre Hill was also used as a parallel from which to fire. The men were expected to sit, an arrangement which looks awkward on paper, but is excellent in practice. (Bannerman 1907: 645)

Japanese sappers could not rely on traditional digging methods which proved too slow, instead sending men out to work in the open protected only by sandbags or ranks of steel plates (90cm by 60cm each, propped up by a wooden stake); behind cover of the plates a parapet would be constructed, supplemented by sandbags because the ground was too rocky to allow for much digging. All work was carried out at night, unless in dead ground, with most sapping teams being able to dig 12–13m of works per night.

The Japanese works sustained relatively little damage from the Russian artillery, being difficult targets to hit with indirect fire (especially where the observation was lacking or indifferent), while the positioning of the direct-fire guns was such that they were easy enough to suppress with counter-battery fire. The small 37mm quick-firing guns and Maxim machine guns were another matter, however, both types of weapon being easily manoeuvrable



within the hill's trenches and each capable of firing through a rifleman's loophole; the 37mm guns in particular necessitated parapets 1.2m thick (the length of two sandbags laid end to end). By the time the attack was due to be launched the Japanese parallels were reasonably close to the lower ring of trenches, though still some 160m from the bunkers on the crest of the hill. Despite the all-too-recent Japanese experience of the high costs that could accrue when offensives were launched before all necessary preparations were complete, the decision was made to go ahead.

The day of 27 November saw 203 Metre Hill wreathed in smoke from constant Japanese artillery fire, making the position look like a volcano in mid eruption according to Tretyakov; the shelling went on all day until 1900hrs when the Japanese infantry assault was launched, two battalions of the 15th Infantry Regiment rushing the lower trench line. A furious bayonet-fight saw the Japanese victorious, with the Russians forced to retreat to the higher trench line; making the most of their success, the Japanese sappers started pushing their saps forward once more, though time and circumstance meant that they were in reality little more than shallow gullies flanked with sandbagged walls as it was too dangerous to dig proper works under constant fire from the Russians in the upper trench line. The attack was continued at 0800hrs the next morning, with the Japanese infantry slowly forcing their way to the redoubt of Peak 210 in the face of tenacious Russian resistance, briefly establishing themselves there by 1430hrs.

The 15th Infantry Regiment's capture of the left redoubt on Peak 210 was the signal for a more general advance up the hill towards Peak 203 to be undertaken by the 1st Kobi (Reserve) Brigade, but things quickly turned sour. Russian guns from other forts and defensive positions, particularly Akasaka Yama to the north-east of 203 Metre Hill, started lashing the Japanese position at Peak 210, the intensity of the fire forcing the Japanese to seek cover below the crest line, while the Kobi soldiers were raked with shrapnel as they struggled up the slope towards Peak 203. Even under such withering fire they managed to take a section of the upper trench line, but the last leg towards the summit proved too much as rifle fire and showers of hand grenades rained down on them from the Russian defenders above – the Kobi broke, fleeing down the hill to their original positions.

The following day saw no infantry action, just more artillery fire with each side pounding sections of the hill again and again in preparation for the next encounter, which would come soon enough. The Russian trenches had been thoroughly wrecked by the strength of the bombardment that the hill had endured over the previous days, with the 28cm siege howitzer shells being a particular problem, obliterating everything they hit. Overnight repairs were

A British No. 1 hand grenade from the early years of World War I that follows closely one of the most popular designs used by the Japanese, especially during the siege of Port Arthur in 1904. The grenades used by the Japanese had wooden handles to allow their users to throw them further than other examples made from cans or cut-down shell casings. The explosive charge was wrapped with a fragmentation ring to increase lethality; when the grenade was thrown, cloth streamers unfurled in flight and ensured that it would land nose-first on its impact fuze. (Courtesy of York Museums Trust/ Wikimedia/CC BY-SA 4.0)

Russian officers watching a Japanese assault on one of the forts during the siege of Port Arthur. Though the general state of the Russian officer corps was poor, with decidedly stunted opportunities for those in Siberian regiments, for an officer with enough ambition to seek advancement there were five military academies to which he could apply; four were for branch specialists, but the Nikolaevskaia Academy of the General Staff in St Petersburg was open to all suitably qualified applicants who could pass the entrance examination. Standards were rigorous: in 1895, for example, of 1,500 officers who took the entrance exam, 500 passed; a second examination whittled the number down to 150, and by the end of the course only 100 remained, and of those only 50 would be allotted posts on the General Staff, the rest being returned to their units (Ray 1961: 590). (Library of Congress)



conducted with feverish haste and then smashed almost immediately as soon as daylight came, making it extremely difficult for the Russians to maintain their fighting positions; the lower trench line was soon entirely useless and had to be abandoned, while the upper trench line and both redoubts were becoming increasingly ragged.

At 0800hrs on 30 November the Japanese launched an attack on the left redoubt again, taking it by storm and raising their flag above their new conquest. Tretyakov saw it happen:

The sight of this flag always filled our men with fury. I knew this, and, pointing to it, shouted to the reserve: 'Go and take it down, my lads!' and, like one man, our sailors rushed into the work ... Twice more the hostile flag made its appearance on top of the hill, but each time it was torn down by my handful of reserves. (Tretyakov 1911: 245)

Such see-sawing over the left (Peak 210) and to a lesser extent right (Peak 203) redoubts would be a regular feature of the next few days.

That same morning at 1000hrs a Japanese company launched another attack towards Peak 210, with the attackers coming close to achieving their goal. The Japanese built up a sandbag wall to protect their modest gains and found themselves on its western side, the returning Russians on the eastern side; at such close quarters the fighting was intense and unforgiving, dominated by rifle butts, bayonets and hand grenades. Further down the hill men from the 7th Division's 26th, 27th and 28th Infantry regiments began moving up the northern slopes to attack the redoubt at Peak 203. Advancing in tightly packed ranks the Japanese reached the upper trench line and tried to



An image from one of the Russian emplacements defending Port Arthur, filled with a heap of Japanese dead. The soldiers were likely all killed during a Russian counter-attack on a Japanese breach of the fortification; such bitter combats were not uncommon, with the same position or trench seized by first one side then the other (often a number of times over the course of a single day), with hand grenades, bayonets and fists often deciding who won. (Library of Congress)

press on to the summit, only to be cut down by Russian marksmen, scores of hand grenades and bayonets for those audacious few who made it to the very top. That night Japanese pioneers drove a new trench up the slope of the hill, designed to provide cover for troops engaged in attacks on Peak 203, though the night did not provide enough time for the work to be completed.

Near the redoubt at Peak 210 the Japanese and Russians still held opposing patches of ground, their territory delineated by the sandbag wall. The Japanese brought up a field telephone, with which they called down artillery strikes on the Russian positions on the previously unobserved reverse slope. As the Russian habit was to shelter their troops on that slope during barrages, only returning to their positions on the crest line when an infantry attack threatened, the newly accurate Japanese gunfire was most unwelcome. It also proved useful in interdicting the passage of replacements quartered in a ravine off the Lower Road that were vital to the continuing Russian preservation of their weakening positions.

The left redoubt was more or less wrecked by this point, though Tretyakov considered the right redoubt still serviceable, and both remained the focus of constant Japanese attacks. The morning of 4 December saw the left redoubt overrun by the Japanese yet again, Tretyakov himself bowled over by the rush of men fleeing from the Russian position. Fighting to get his soldiers into some sort of order, he was as much a spectator as a participant:

By this time we could see Japanese soldiers springing up on to the top, and they began at once to fire along the road. At the same moment several dozen men scrambled up to me from below, and, standing round me, began to fire and shout hoarsely 'Hurrah!' In the midst of all this noise and firing I felt that matters had





Fighting to the death on 203 Metre Hill, 30 November 1904

Throughout the past two months General Nogi's Japanese divisions have battered themselves bloody all along the line of Russian defences protecting Port Arthur; there have been some local successes, but at a terrible cost, forcing the Japanese commanders to decide on a new course of action — launching concerted attacks against 203 Metre Hill on the western flank of the Russian defences. If the hill falls it will allow Japanese guns to target every part of the city and the remaining Russian ships in the port, and thus the struggle over its possession has been intense and especially hard-fought. The day is bitterly cold and the ground iron-hard. More than once this morning the Japanese have broken through and captured trenches and breastworks of the left redoubt, only to be ejected by

determined Russian counter-attacks, such as the one developing here. A small band of men from the 7th Division have fought their way into a Russian position once again, though their proud display of a regimental battle flag over their new conquest has enraged the Russians; a motley group of soldiers together with a lieutenant from the 5th East Siberian Rifle Regiment have stormed back into the position, determined to drive the Japanese out once and for all. They are led by an officer who is conspicuous due to the fine quality and relative cleanliness of his uniform in comparison to those of the bedraggled men who follow him; he has fallen wounded, but his men charge on regardless, engaging the Japanese at bayonet-point in a vicious mêlée that will offer no quarter.

passed beyond my control, while all the time the number of the Japanese on the hill was growing and growing. Luckily, the reserves were not more than 10 paces [7m] from me now ... The only thing to be done now was to make a rush with the new-comers and the men I had round me, and this we did. Those who had retreated, finding they were reinforced, threw themselves on the Japanese with a deafening shout, and we were once again masters of the hill. (Tretyakov 1911: 246)

Despite the success of Tretyakov's counter-attack the action was yet another drain on the dwindling Russian reserves. The right redoubt now became the dedicated target for the 28cm siege howitzers, and it soon enough came to resemble its counterpart to the left, a confusion of thrown earth and jutting timbers. On the following day, just before 1400hrs on 5 December, yet another Japanese attack gained the heights, this time seeming to secure the ruins of both left and right redoubts and the crest line between them. A scratch force was pulled together, charging the Japanese and forcing them from the position, only for the Russians to be pushed off in their turn. Several more counter-attacks were launched, each with the same result, until the Russian defenders were too weak to make any further serious attempts on the crest, over half the men being casualties and every single officer wounded or dead. By this time the Japanese had two battalions on top of the hill, and by 1700hrs their possession of 203 Metre Hill was complete.

The cost to the both sides had been appalling, with 14,000 Japanese dead (most of them from the 7th Division) and 6,000 Russian dead. In the immediate aftermath of the hill's fall a Japanese artillery observation team established a position on 6 December that gave them a perfect view of the Russian squadron in the harbour below. During a two-day period the observers guided their shells onto the ships, sinking three battleships and two cruisers. The Russians could fight on if they wanted, but with no prospect of relief from either land or sea, there was no doubt as to the final outcome.

Analysis

THE YALU RIVER

In his approach to the Yalu and the methods which he employed to cross the river and drive the Russians from the western bank, Kuroki demonstrated many of the best traits of the Imperial Japanese Army, including initiative, intelligence, determination and courage. Western observers were uniformly impressed, and began to reassess their assumptions about the Japanese, as well as some of their more generous attitudes to the Russians.

With Zasluch, Kuroki had been gifted an enemy who combined several significant flaws into one generally disastrous package: the Russian's contempt for the Japanese led him to underestimate their capabilities drastically; his poor relationship with Kuropatkin, exacerbated by an inflated sense of his own military ability, led him to ignore Kuropatkin's very clear orders; and he lacked the skill, temperament and decisiveness required to organize or fight a division-sized force. Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Hamilton, the British military

Cavalrymen of the Siberian Mounted Rifles pose for a photograph, armed with the M1891 Dragoon carbine (a shorter version of the Mosin-Nagant rifle that was 123.2cm long and issued without a bayonet) and the *shashka* – a gently curving single-edged sabre that lacked a handguard, and which was patterned after traditional Caucasian and Cossack swords. The cavalrymen carry their ammunition in bandoliers and wear the older 1881-pattern tunic (the 1897 pattern had two rows of brass buttons down the front), blue-grey breeches and peakless *furashka* caps (the lack of a visor being common only among non-Siberian units), though these would usually be replaced by the warmer sheepskin *papaha* hats when on campaign. (Library of Congress)



observer who was travelling with Kuroki's army, thought that Zasulich was in an invidious position, being given a force too small to fight well and yet too big to be able to extract itself from trouble easily (Hamilton 1905: 79). There may be some truth to this view, but Zasulich held a strong defensive position, most of the advantages of which he squandered through indifference to his enemy's dispositions as well as his own.

The Russian positions were set out in full view of the enemy, letting Kuroki know all he needed about where to place his own batteries and launch his thrusts. The exposure of the Russian guns – potentially one of the most effective tools at Zasulich's disposal, especially when facing an enemy that would be forced into a series of choke-points whenever attempting to cross the Yalu – meant that they were effectively suppressed by the Japanese before their strength could be brought to bear. Maxim machine guns, also available to the Russians, were hardly used, all of them being captured in the retreat.

In crossing the Yalu, Kuroki set the tone for much of the rest of the war – Japanese attacks against Russian defensive positions that resulted in Japanese victories and Russian withdrawals. The victory was an important fillip for Japanese morale, and a severe setback to Russian arms. Strategically, the crossing of the Yalu, combined with the landing of Oku's Second Army on the Liaotung Peninsula, confirmed that the initiative was firmly in Japanese hands.

LIAOYANG

Kuropatkin had impressively strong forces in a very well-defended site, but he never felt that the odds were with him. The paucity of good Russian intelligence certainly contributed to his outlook, as did the unbroken series of defeats his soldiers had endured at the hands of the Japanese. Ōyama, on the other hand, understood the value of pressing his luck, even though outnumbered and outgunned, especially against a hesitant and shaky enemy. Advancing on a superior force in a well-established defensive position was bold, and against a more aggressive opponent Ōyama's sweeping simultaneous attacks against both wings of the Russian line may well have opened him up to devastating counter-attacks that the Japanese would have been too overstretched to repel. Even so, it was a closer affair than the Russian defeat suggested.

The performance of the Russian guns still varied from unit to unit, but the careful siting of batteries in well-considered defensive positions coupled with the observational advantages that came with the possession of Cairn Hill meant that they were more effective than in previous engagements, especially when presented with the sometimes close-packed ranks of advancing Japanese infantry. Machine guns also played a limited role, but they were too few in number to have much more than local effect. The Russian infantry defending Cairn Hill also fought well, making the most of their well-prepared trenches and the mistakes of their enemies. As for the Japanese, their attacks against Cairn Hill showed great, even heroic spirit, but they did not succeed. Their infantry forces were not strong enough, their artillery support not concentrated enough, and their tactics not suitable for the task they were undertaking, resulting in significant casualties for no appreciable gain.



Kuropatkin, in command of more significant forces operating from an extremely strong defensive base, ought to have been able to make the most of his overstretched opponent, pinning his various advances and defeating them in detail, but he never felt confident enough to commit the reserves that would be necessary to achieve such a victory because of his debilitating fear that the Japanese outnumbered him. With Kuropatkin being defensively minded at the best of times, the prospect of gambling his entire army in the face of so many unknowns led him to cede the initiative to Ōyama, who well understood that threatening the lines of communication behind the Russian left would likely unhinge Kuropatkin's entire position. Ōyama won a significant victory, but he did not have enough troops, either infantry or cavalry, to stop the Russians from slipping away. Even so, the capture of Liaoyang gave Ōyama a hub where he could consolidate his forces and prepare for further advances north, and there was now no Russian threat that could interfere with Nogi's siege of Port Arthur.

203 METRE HILL

Nogi was in some ways typical of many senior Japanese officers: like him they had made their reputations in the new dynasty's early wars, but their subsequent rise was often due more to social connections than talent, and their military education had not properly prepared them for the command of large formations or the intricacies of operational warfare. When problems were encountered the first reaction of many Japanese commanders, lacking experience in fighting their brigades or a good understanding of how to apply strategy in practical situations, was to meet such obstacles head-on, relying on fortitude and will-power to see them and their men through. Nogi, faced with

A detachment of soldiers from Major-General Vladimir N. Orlov's 54th Infantry Division in the vicinity of the Yentai coal mines during the battle for Liaoyang, August–September 1904. The battles at Liaoyang and that of Mukden the following year were signs of things to come: encounters between hundreds of thousands of men that lasted weeks, not days, resulting in tens of thousands of casualties (42,000 at Liaoyang and around 164,000 at Mukden) from modern weapons such as machine guns and particularly the ever-more-lethal artillery pieces. It became clear that infantry tactics would have to adapt to the dawning realities of industrial warfare, with a greater reliance on open-order movement and entrenchments being the most obvious ways of mitigating the effect of automatic weapons and shellfire that could dominate large swathes of ground more or less with impunity. (Valerian Gribayedoffullstein bild via Getty Images)



ABOVE LEFT

Japanese soldiers with a wounded comrade, summer 1904. The cost of victory for the Japanese at Liaoyang was high – 5,557 killed, 17,976 wounded and 236 taken prisoner. Losses of that magnitude were not sustainable for such a small army (136,000 first-line troops, around 400,000 men with all reserves and territorial units included) and had a direct impact on the Japanese commanders' ability to exploit their victories, their reserves usually having been exhausted in the main battle. (ullstein bild/ ullstein bild via Getty Images)



ABOVE RIGHT

Japanese soldiers in high spirits after taking control of Port Arthur in the early days of 1905. The cost had been prohibitively high; though accurate tallies of the Japanese losses vary, the most likely number was 91,549 casualties, including over 33,000 sick and 14,000 killed in action or who died of their wounds. Russian losses came to 31,306 men including 6,000 killed in action, with a further 24,369 men taken prisoner after the capitulation, the majority of them wounded. (Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images)

a complex system of modern defences, fell back on the sort of blunt aggression that can be commendable in a junior officer, relying on fighting spirit to carry the day. The cost in dead in wounded was catastrophic, for Nogi personally as well as the whole Third Army.

The Japanese adapted to their new situation, developing ingenious methods of trench-building in the rocky soil as well as designing their own versions of hand grenades to help make breaches in the enemy's defences. Even so, it is notable that on multiple occasions it was the bayonet which decided matters when the opposing sides came together. The most important tool at the disposal of the Japanese, however, was their artillery, especially the mighty 28cm siege howitzers; when such weapons were coupled with the professional skill of the Japanese gun crews, they allowed the infantry the chance to make headway in the face of furious opposition.

Russian defensive tactics were often effective, especially when they were built around the intelligent use of machine guns, interlocking fields of fire and searchlights. The heavy use of hand grenades as well as a plethora of other improvised explosive devices caused serious casualties among the Japanese, who often had little choice in their avenues of attack. Despite the Russians enjoying such advantages, as well as the strength of the fortifications that crowned the hills and surrounded the town, the failures in Russian command and control played their part here too, with poor leadership compounded by incompetence resulting in tactical and logistical failures that cost the defenders dearly. The surrender of Port Arthur, even though there was still an active garrison with considerable supplies, was seen as a great disgrace, but once the Japanese had taken 203 Metre Hill the end could only have been a matter of time; further resistance was more a matter of pride than practicality.

The fall of Port Arthur, devastating as it was, did not end the war. The campaigning in the north would drag on for several more months before the vast encounter at Mukden (20 February–10 March 1905) – at the time the largest battle ever fought – ended any Russian illusions of victory on land, while the crushing Japanese naval victory at Tsushima (27–28 May 1905) made Tsar Nicholas II's humiliation complete.

Aftermath

The Japanese forces were stretched to their limits by the war, and even though Japan fielded its entire Army it always lacked the strength to capitalize on its tactical victories. Nevertheless, by defeating the Russian Empire Japan had confirmed its status as a power of the first rank. The war stimulated the growth of the Imperial Japanese Navy, swollen with confidence thanks to its drubbing of the Russian fleets, and also helped Japan secure its hold on the Korean peninsula, fully annexing it by 1910. It also solidified the Imperial Japanese Army's role at the heart of a society that would see its martial culture and worship of the Emperor blend into a toxic and aggressive nationalism that evolved to dictate domestic and foreign affairs to a disastrous degree.

For the Russians the great shock of the defeat fed into the domestic political turmoil that was running like fire throughout the nation in 1905. The revolution of that year led to a series of reforms and a new constitution in 1906, but the changes it ushered in were fragile and mostly superficial, leaving the large fissures of Russian social and economic life more or less unhealed. A similar approach was taken with the Imperial Russian Army,



A battery of Russian artillery (likely 87mm M1887 light field guns) in a millet field, 1904. Russian line artillery was better than that utilized by the Japanese – the M1887 had a greater range (6,500m) and a better rate of fire than comparable enemy guns – but Russian gun crews were much less consistent in target acquisition, and poor observation meant that erroneous fire often went uncorrected. In addition, it was noted on several occasions that when firing on advancing Japanese infantry, the Russian gunners had set their shrapnel shells to explode at 150m above ground level, far too high to have any real effect. (Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images)

RIGHT

Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Corvisart, a prominent French military observer of the war, engaging with some Japanese officers in a competition at the shooting range in Major-General Kuroki's camp, 18 March 1905. The course of the war was followed with intense interest by observers from all the great powers, and many of the reports that such men sent back gave a clear picture of how warfare was evolving. Why most European armies failed to adapt to the evolution of communications, machine guns and massed artillery, despite all the evidence of such systems that the Russo-Japanese War provided, is one of the enduring questions in the slide towards war in 1914. (DEA / BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA / Getty Images)



FAR RIGHT

Japanese soldiers behind entrenchments, Manchuria. The reality of driving an assault home, especially against an enemy trench line, was not always straightforward; the attacking side would often hesitate around 10m in front of the enemy trench, trading fire with the defenders until the boldest of the attackers threw themselves forward, an action that usually encouraged others to follow their example, eventually drawing the whole unit into the last stage of the assault. The practice among both Japanese and Russian defenders was often to withdraw around ten paces (7m) from the trench, making it an obstacle for the attackers to cross rather than capture; counter-attacks were launched with a single close-range volley followed by a bayonet charge to dislodge the attacking force. (Library of Congress)

which underwent a number of hastily applied changes in the wake of its defeat, though much of the work was little more than a case of papering over the cracks. Many of the same problems seen in 1904–05 were still apparent when the Army marched back to war in 1914, the reforms failing because they did not address the systemic problems that defined the Army, including the character of the officer corps, the dysfunctional relationship between officers, NCOs and men, and the treatment of soldiers as little more than serfs in uniform.

For the Americans, French, Germans and British, the war had provided ample evidence of the importance of new communication systems, the increasing value of artillery, and the utility of the machine gun in both attack and defence. Trenches had proved essential in protecting troops from the effects of shelling and the long range of rifle fire, while hand grenades had demonstrated their worth in the close-quarter battles that such defensive systems made necessary. Cavalry was seen to have been poorly represented by both sides, so few firm conclusions were drawn, but the fact that such a large-scale conflict could be conducted without recourse to such a supposedly essential strategic arm was telling in and of itself. The host of observers from Western nations were alive to all these developments, most of them recognizing their importance and commenting on them at length in the plethora of reports and books that they published in the immediate wake of the war, but in the majority of cases the impact on Western doctrine, training and tactics was minimal.

The conflict between Russia and Japan upset old imperial certainties and presaged the logistical and technological factors that to a startling degree would dominate World War I. The industrialization of battle had been slowly developing through the late 19th century, with elements appearing (to various extents) in the Italian and German wars of unification, the Franco-Prussian War and colonial revolts such as the Second Anglo-Boer War, but in Manchuria all the elements were finally in the same place at the same time, for those who cared to look.

UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

Russian

The Imperial Russian Army (*Russkaya imperatorskaya armiya*) had a standing force of around 1,000,000 men that could be expanded to 3,500,000 men in the event of a full mobilization. The corps was the largest formation and consisted of two or three infantry divisions and a cavalry division. Each infantry division had two brigades, each with two regiments of infantry. A regiment had an establishment of 3,100 men in four battalions (four companies to a battalion), though a Siberian infantry regiment of the Eastern District had only two or three battalions and thus a lower establishment of around 2,000 men. Each division also had an integral artillery brigade of between six and eight batteries, each with eight guns. The Russian army corps that were transferred from the west during the course of the war were each 28,000 men strong with 112 guns (the corps that served in Manchuria were the 1st, 4th, 8th, 10th, 16th and 17th).

At the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War all the units stationed in East Asia were assigned to three corps, though these were paper formations only, having no practical role in the management or fighting of troops. There were no divisional-size units in the Eastern District, with East Siberian rifle regiments operating in two-regiment brigades, though ad hoc divisions quickly emerged as the conflict developed. There were 32 East Siberian rifle regiments: a three-battalion regiment had an establishment of 39 officers and 1,906 men; several regiments lacked a third battalion, and even for those with three it was common for them to be understrength, the average battalion numbering around 700 bayonets at the outset of the war. Each regiment also had a small reconnaissance force, the *okhotniki*, which was a mounted scout company of two officers and 140 other ranks.

There were four regular rifle regiments stationed in East Asia (the 123rd, 124th, 139th and 140th), each with four battalions, making for a total establishment of 312 officers and 15,248 men. There were 16 battalions of reserve infantry, totalling 252 officers and 15,300 men, as well as 55 companies of Frontier Guard infantry totalling 268 officers and 13,103 men. The Siberian Militia, often used for protection and other second-line duties, was organized into eight divisions, each having 12 1,000-strong battalions. Finally, there was a battalion of fortress infantry from Nikolaievsk that added a further 20 officers and 1,186 men to the tally.

There were six line and 36 Cossack cavalry squadrons in theatre at the outbreak of war, rising rapidly to 207 squadrons (two-thirds of them Cossacks, the rest dragoons or mounted Frontier Guards) by March 1904. The Cossacks were drawn from the Don, Oranberg, Ural, Siberian, Trans-Baikal, Amur and Ussuri *voisko* ('hosts') and lacked the élan of their western counterparts. A Cossack regiment had 25 officers and 955 other ranks divided into six *sotnias* (squadrons).

The East Siberian Artillery consisted of eight brigades each of four batteries, 32 batteries in total. Each brigade could be further divided into two *divizioni* of two batteries for tactical purposes. At the outbreak of the war the East Siberian Artillery was being upgraded to the 76.2mm Putilov M1902 quick-firing field gun, with 23 of the 32 batteries having already been supplied with the new weapons, the remaining nine receiving theirs during the course of the conflict. Normal practice was to assign an artillery brigade to an infantry division, the brigade taking on its division's designation (Ivanov & Jowett 2004: 15–17). The Russian forces had a total of 64 Maxim machine guns at the outbreak of the war.

Japanese

The Imperial Japanese Army (*Dai-Nippon Teikoku Rikugun*) was nearly 400,000 men strong and was divided into four 'armies' for the Manchurian campaign that were in effect corps-level organizations, each consisting of three infantry divisions with supporting cavalry and artillery brigades. The regular Imperial Japanese Army consisted of the Guards Division (*Konoe Shidan*), 12 infantry divisions (*Shidan*), two independent cavalry brigades (each of two regiments of four squadrons) and two independent artillery brigades (three regiments each, with each regiment having six batteries). Each infantry division was made up of two brigades (*Ryodan*), each of two infantry regiments (*Hohei Rentai*) – an infantry regiment had three battalions (*Daitai*), each consisting of four companies (*Chutai*) of five officers and 250 men; a cavalry regiment (*Kihe Rentai*) which had 17 officers and 416 men in three squadrons (*Hiko Chutai*), each 140 strong and fielding four troops; an artillery regiment (*Hōhei Rentai*); a pioneer/engineer battalion (*Kohei Daitai*) of 600 men in three companies (*Chutai*); and a telegraph company of three sections. Other supporting

units included a pontoon train, a medical detachment, an ammunition column made up of seven ammunition trains, a provision column, a horse depot and six field hospitals with trains. In time of need, reserve units (*Kobi*) would be activated and deployed as brigades attached to regular Army divisions.

There were 13 regiments (*Rentai*) of line artillery (*Yasen Hōhei*) in the Imperial Japanese Army, one for each infantry division, with each *Rentai* numbered accordingly; additionally, there were a further two brigades of artillery (a total of six regiments organized in the same fashion as those of the line divisions, and numbered 14 to 19) that came under the direct control of the army commander in time of war. An artillery *Rentai* had 36 guns, was commanded by a colonel and had two battalions (*Daitai*), each commanded by a major and fielding three batteries (*Hodai*). Each battery had five officers, 198 men and six guns, and was commanded by a captain; each *Hodai* had three platoons (*Shotai*) which each consisted of two sections (*Hanshotai*) commanded by a sergeant.



Japanese troops ferried from their transports by sampans and landing at Chinampo (modern-day Nampo, North Korea), March 1904. During the landings most of the sampans were lashed together in groups of three or four, their progress to the shore aided by tugs like the one visible in the background. The Japanese characters on the hull indicate the number of the boat and its carrying capacity, while the zigzag lines mark this unit out as belonging to the quartermaster's department. (Library of Congress)

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Dedication

To Chris Stratton, who ran away to Denmark for all the right reasons.

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Editor's note

The names of Japanese individuals follow the Asian convention of placing the family name first, followed by the given name (e.g. General Kodama's full name would be given as General Kodama Gentarō). Ranks are given in their English equivalents for both Russian and Japanese combatants. Dates are given in the New Style Gregorian calendar as opposed to the Julian (Old Style) calendar used in the Russian Empire prior to 1918. Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1873, but also continued using a dating system based on the years of a given emperor's reign (e.g. 'Year 30' was 1898, 30 years after the 1868 restoration of the Empire). Metric units of measurement have been employed for both Russian and Japanese instances; by 1886 Japan had adopted the metric standard alongside its more traditional Chinese-based system of measurement, with the exception of calibres. For Russian measurements, the original measurements are given, accompanied by a conversion into metric. The line was an archaic Russian measurement equal to .100 of an English inch, or 2.54mm. The arshin or cubit was a Russian measurement equal to 28 English inches, or 71.12cm. The verst was equal to 1,500 arshiny (1.07km). The term 'pace' has been interpreted to equate to an arshin.

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